

**GOD'S
HEALING
GRACE**

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A COMPASSbook from BIBLE READING FELLOWSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

There is much interest in the healing ministry in the Church today. This was not so until recent years (with a few notable exceptions). Clergy and laity who became involved were looked upon with suspicion. There are still many in the Church who are unsettled by this ministry, but, many others, prodded by the Holy Spirit, have been touched by it, responding in faith to Jesus' command to heal the sick.

The absence of a healing ministry in the Church, until recent years, had led, in the Western World, to a void which even secular society is now beginning to recognize. The failure to recognize Christ's emphasis on healing was also reflected in the training and preparation of seminary students for ministry. The focus on the abstract and the intellectual had not only neglected training in this area, but actually dismissed it. By "demythologizing" scripture, students had been blinded by intellect to an essential aspect of Jesus' ministry. As a result, many of the earlier exponents of the healing ministry came, not only from the laity, but specifically through the ministry of women.

In the following pages, I will answer three questions: Does God really heal today? If God does heal today, are my problems worth taking to Him? If my problems are worth taking to God, how do I go about doing it?

OVERCOMING DOUBT

The fact that we ask if God really heals implies that we, also, have been infected indirectly by the cleansing process of modern theological training. If we believe in the historical authenticity of scripture, there is absolutely no question of whether God healed in ancient times. The evidence in both the Old and, especially, the New Testament, says emphatically, “Yes, God does heal.” Not only does God heal, but Jesus, by example and command, laid that ministry upon those who would follow him.

Why is there a reluctance to accept the healing ministry of Jesus as demonstrated by both his example and his command? To understand this, I shall share a personal example. As a young priest I was privileged on many occasions to sit at the feet of an outstanding teacher and theologian, the Most Rev. Philip Carrington, then Archbishop of Quebec, and former Dean of Divinity at Bishop’s University, Lennoxville, Quebec. It was both a delight and a privilege to listen to the archbishop expound on scripture and apologetics. I remember a question asked of him by a seminary student: “How would you define the Christian faith?” His reply: “I would stand straight with my hands at my side and say the Apostles Creed.” To me, then and today, it was a very orthodox and welcomed response by such an outstanding scholar and theologian.

However, there was another side to this inspiring teacher. When asked about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4) he readily accepted them as authentic within the context of New Testament times, but questioned whether they extended beyond that point in history. In other words, the question was: “Did the gifts of the Spirit, including the gift of healing, die with the apostles?” It was this reluctance on the part of the archbishop to accept manifestations of modern-day healing which characterized that day’s theological training.

I was fortunate to have been able to absorb much of the orthodox teaching of the archbishop, but I also pondered, in silence, his reply concerning the gifts of the Spirit. A few years before ordination, I was at a point in my spiritual journey where I questioned my calling to the priesthood. So strong was this doubt that I left my theological studies, and was accepted in a managerial training program for a Montreal bank. At that time I never intended to continue my studies toward ordination, but God had other plans. As a young family, we moved into an apartment in Montreal, Quebec, one block from an Anglo-Catholic parish, St. Columba's. We began to attend St. Columba's. We were not from an Anglo-Catholic background, but we had no car to go elsewhere. It soon became evident to us that something was happening in this parish. The church was filled to overflowing. Encouraged by the rector, Father Norman Peterson, Dr. Albert Cliff, a layman and a biochemist, led a Bible study and spearheaded a healing ministry. Some may remember the catchy phrase *Let Go, and Let God*. It was the title of Dr. Cliff's book on the healing ministry.

Slowly, my eyes began to be opened. Something, Someone was tugging at my spirit. St. Columba's was alive. Why and how I did not know, but I could not escape the outpouring of the Spirit. My eyes were opened, as were my ears, as Dr. Cliff read and expounded that beautiful passage from 2 Kings 5, the account of Naaman the leper. "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean." At first Naaman was reluctant. Why wash in the dirty Jordan? He was then confronted by his servants, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much rather, then, when he says to you 'wash and be clean'? So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean." (2 Kings 5:10-14 RSV) The Biblical account was being transported into the 20th century. The message came alive. What God did then was happening now. What Jesus commanded of his apostles then, was happening now.

As a consequence, I would not be a victim of theological correctness in the years that followed. It was not unlike the example related by Dr. Cliff of the blind woman who came to him for healing. He prayed for her, laying his hands upon her. Some time later she returned and said: "Thank you, Dr. Cliff, for giving me my sight." She was still physically blind and so Dr. Cliff momentarily wondered what she meant. "I have new sight," she continued. She could live with her physical blindness because God had opened her eyes in a way that He only could do. So also my eyes had been opened to the possibilities of the healing ministry. The gifts of the Spirit were alive. That could never be taken away. After a year I was ready to return to my theological studies, but with a new vision.

My first experience as a priest in the area of physical healing came as a result of a phone call from a parishioner. Her father was dying of pneumonia and the doctor suggested that she call her priest. I travelled some 17 miles over snow blown roads in northern Quebec to be with them. I prayed with the elderly gentleman and we celebrated a family eucharist together. It was a solemn moment. I returned home that night. The following morning I received a phone call from his daughter. The crisis had passed. He would live, and he did for several more years in fullness of health. I was filled with an inward joy at seeing Jesus' promise fulfilled, and a grateful heart for Dr. Cliff's teaching and witness.

What are the implications behind the question "Does God really heal today?" Is it because we, without realizing it, have been influenced by a theology that denies the transcendent power of God, a theology that acknowledges that God created the world, but that He then left it to run by itself? Is it because we have been so in awe of the many advances made in modern medicine that we question the need of other means? Do we feel that modern medicine and advanced surgical skills are God's only way of bringing about modern-day healing? Is it because we have experienced the untimely death through illness of someone close to us? Is it because we may have witnessed someone whom we regarded as filled with faith suddenly

struck down? Have we experienced the power of prayer in our own lives only to see it “fail” as we pray for others?

How can we believe in God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, and God the Holy Spirit, and fail to carry that belief to the logical conclusion that God the Father loves us and cares for us today, that Jesus the Son showed us God’s healing power and challenged us to carry on that ministry, and that God the Holy Spirit empowers us for that work? I believe it is because intellectual pride and the correctness of the day distorts the vision. John said in his testimony concerning Jesus, “For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for it is not by measure that He gives the Spirit” (John 3:34 RSV). The Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit cannot be measured, they cannot be theologically dissected. Our very intellect can be a stumbling block if it becomes the Christian’s test of belief. A transcendent God cannot be controlled by the mind. Hence, it becomes, as Paul wrote, “a folly to Gentiles.” In his words, “Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:20ff RSV)

Belief that God no longer intervenes in miraculous ways takes many forms today. From a theological perspective, if we do not believe that God heals today, we limit the effectiveness of His power in our lives and in the life of the Church. If we do believe that He heals today, we are saying that God is operative in the here and now, as He was operative in the fields and valleys, the mountains and the lakes of distant Israel of two thousand years ago. As Herbert Butterfield wrote, “Christianity is an historical religion in a particular technical sense that the term possesses—it presents us with religious doctrines which are at the same time historical events or historical interpretations” (Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, p.3). The God of Israel is the God of history. The incarnate Son of God lives in and through history and, for the believing Christian, continues to be involved in history and in our personal lives.

The responsibility for how we interpret God in history rests not on the latest fad of the day, but on our own convictions. This is essential if we are to understand healing both within history past as well as present. Again, quoting Herbert Butterfield: “On the decisive question of the posture one should adopt towards life or the interpretation one would give to the whole human story, it would be unwise to surrender one’s judgment to a scholar, any more than one would expect a scholar by reason of his technical accomplishments to be more skilled than other people in making love or choosing a wife. Neither should one be guided in the great decision by the spirit of an age—for, concerning the spirit of any age, even technical history can find many disillusioning things to say. Our final interpretation of history is the most sovereign decision we can take, and it is clear that every one of us, standing alone in the universe, has to take it for himself. It is our decision about religion, our total attitude to things, and about the way we will appropriate life. And, it is inseparable from our decision about the role we are going to play ourselves in that very drama of life.” (Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, p.25) The healing ministry necessitates not only an understanding of the God of history, but a personal commitment to the God of history, a transcendent God who works out His purpose in and through history.

For individual reflection: What is your “theology” of Christian healing today?

For group discussion: What stumbling blocks to the healing ministry exist within your church, your community? What could or should be done to overcome these obstacles?

MANIFESTATIONS OF HEALING GRACE

It is easy for us to idolize the field of medicine, to stand in awe of those whose years of training and dedication have brought us to where we are. It is true that magnificent achievements have been made scientifically, especially in recent years. Our life span has increased from 48 at the turn of the century, to 62 in the early thirties at the dawn of Social Security, to over 70 today. The field of medicine has contributed so much in recent years: the Salk vaccine for polio, organ transplants, MRI machines. The field continues to explode.

Recently, when I returned to my boyhood home for our 50th High School reunion, I realized I was facing a street where boyhood schoolmates, three boys from one family, had lived. One summer the three contracted polio—one died, one was left crippled, and the other one was unscathed. The crippled one later committed suicide rather than continue the personal agony of being crippled. Today we rarely hear of polio in the western world. Yes, tremendous advances have been made.

And yet, there is the other side. Much of the research concerning AIDS, cancer, Alzheimer disease and gene research continues with frustration. People's hopes are raised up, only to come crashing down. We are a people grasping for straws. "If only they could find the answer," we moan. We are disappointed because we have come to believe that science can cure all of our ills. We, like those of old, would build our medical towers of Babel, saying, "that we might make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:4 NIV). Truly, God has used and continues to use the medical profession as a means of healing, but alone it is not enough.

The medical profession is ultimately made up of human beings like ourselves. I have known, professionally and personally, a number of doctors through the years. Some I have come to respect for their skills, their humility, and their faith. I am particularly

impressed when I read about doctors who pray with their patients before operations. I personally feel more comfortable with a doctor or a surgeon who does not think he has all the answers. Well I remember the comment of a doctor, having removed a growth from my scalp, saying, “I don’t believe that it is cancerous, but I am sending it off to the lab. I don’t believe in playing God.” I felt comfortable with him.

There are those who are uncomfortable with accepting the humanity of those in the medical profession. They want their gods, and they are disappointed and dismayed when they realize that their doctors are not gods. For them it would be not only uncomfortable, but unacceptable, to hear a doctor say that he did not have the answer. How would they react to a recent comment made to me by a surgeon who said he wrestled most of the night with himself about a scheduled surgery the next morning? He only went to sleep when he came to the realization that he would have to call a colleague in the next morning to assist him. I would trust him as my doctor.

It is not uncommon today for hospitals, including secular ones, to have full time chaplains on their staff. Their role is not only to minister to patients, to inform local clergy, but to sit on review boards with doctors to discuss difficult decisions relating to the moral and spiritual aspects of a patient’s illness. This is a far cry from just thirty years ago when clergy were tolerated at best in many hospitals. Yes, there is a growing awareness that human beings are not only mind and body, but also soul and spirit.

Some 35 years ago, one of our daughters, then eight years old, was diagnosed as having a neuroblastoma, a rare childhood cancer. Though living in Canada at the time, we found our way to Memorial Hospital in New York. The growth proved to be inoperable. Her radiologist, Dr. Ralph Phillips, was considered to be the leading radiologist in the world. (He was the one asked to treat John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State.) He consulted with his colleagues concerning the best radiation treatment to alleviate the intense pain Faith was experiencing. He shared his conclusion with us, telling us what he proposed to do—radiate from the front. Without a second of

reflection, I blurted out, “Dr. Phillips, Faith complains of the pain in her back,” and pointed to where it was. Without a moment of hesitation, Dr. Phillips responded: “Father Salt thinks we should treat her from the back, turn her over.” I had not said that, but Dr. Phillips was responding intuitively to my non-professional observation. In time the tumor totally disappeared, as did all signs of the disease, though three years later it returned under different circumstances.

Dr. Phillips and our family kept in touch down through the years. When we moved to New Jersey in 1972 he was living not far from us. He was now retired. One day, several years later, I received a call from his wife Barbara telling me that Dr. Phillips was in the hospital. On one of my visits with him I reminded him of the incident relating to Faith’s radiation treatment. It was difficult for me to tell the story. I could feel my emotions. When I had finished, with tears in his eyes, he said, “I didn’t make that decision.” We were both crying. We both were acknowledging a spiritual experience which was beyond human rationality.

No, medicine does not have all the answers. I am grateful to those who are called to be doctors and surgeons and pathologists. I am grateful for their ministry of healing. But having said this, there is more; and the fullness of healing is still a mystery, a mystery that passes human understanding. Those of us called as laity and clergy to share in that ministry are equally a part of that mystery.

All of us have experienced “failure” in prayers for ourselves or for others. By that, I mean, the person did not recover; the disease did not leave; the person’s lifestyle continued, etc. We grow discouraged and maybe, even, give up praying. We are not alone. Many have been there. I have been there. So also have the disciples.

In Acts 12 we read that the apostle Peter had been arrested. Herod had killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. Seeing that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take Peter. It was his intent to have him killed also. This was an ultimate moment of despair on the part of the disciples. The scripture tells us that many of them

gathered together, specifically for prayer. They were praying, we assume, for the release of Peter unharmed.

Acts 12 tells us of the miraculous intervention of the angel who released Peter's chains and commanded him to get up and to follow him. This was taking place at the very moment the disciples were praying. When Peter, freed from prison, found his way to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, he knocked on the door. A maid named Rhoda recognized his voice, ran to the others at prayer, exclaiming, "It's Peter." Their response was "You are mad. It is his angel." They could not believe that their prayers had been answered. They had been blinded by their failure in the death of James. They had been blinded by the might of the powers of this world. They had been blinded by despair itself. Yet God had provided the ultimate healing—life itself. He had directly intervened.

We see results only from our own perspective. The response of the followers, "You are mad," indicates that they did not really believe that their prayers were being effective. James had not been protected. Why should Peter be? Yet he was. I do not believe that God calls us either to succeed or to fail. We are only called to be faithful. At least those followers, in spite of the bleakness of the moment, in spite of their unbelief, were being faithful in prayer.

We can learn much from this. It is not what appears to be, but what actually is, that is important. A number of years ago I was sharing in a healing mission in Jamaica. A woman joined us at the end of a service for a ride home. She was obviously physically blind. I asked her about her blindness and how it happened. She told me that it happened when she was nineteen. It was a physical deterioration of the eyes and nothing could be done about it. "But you know," she said, "though I have been blind since I was nineteen, I have never lost sight of the Lord." The radiance on her face verified what she was saying with her lips. She was healed in a way not unlike that woman who thanked Dr. Cliff many years before for giving her that spiritual sight. We are conditioned by our failures. We are conditioned also by what we have predetermined to be healing. We sometimes fail "to see" what God Himself has in mind.

Not too many years ago, I met, through the sickness of his wife, a very successful businessman. He had had an outstanding career in business. At one time he had been approached to be a candidate for the governorship of his state. He had been a war hero, a pilot with 35 sorties over Europe, a recipient of the Distinguished Flying Cross, and he had the air medal with several clusters. He was not a believer, and unashamedly told me so. Following his wife's death, I visited him and he told me that he had just been diagnosed with esophageal cancer and would soon be admitted to the hospital. I asked if he would let me know when he went so that I might visit him there. He said he would.

Vic was true to his word, and I visited him on several occasions before his operation. On one of those occasions he told me, "Al, you are a good salesman, but I am not ready to buy." Following his operation he spent two weeks in intensive care before going to a private room with 24 hour nursing care. Because of tubes in his throat, he could not speak. I visited him regularly. On one occasion he asked for a writing pad and pencil. He simply wrote the words, "Not yet." A week later I was called to the hospital. Vic wanted to see me. I knew what it was for. (God had been preparing both Vic and me for this moment.) Going to him I said, "Vic, you want to be baptized. You want to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior." His eyes, the nod of his head, told me "yes." I went to the nursing station, looked around, and said to one of the nurses, "You are a Christian, aren't you? I need a witness." With a styrofoam cup filled with water, I baptized Vic "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." He was crying. The nurse was crying. I was crying, and his daughter, having just come into the room, was crying also. The tears were tears of joy.

A week later Vic's lung collapsed. He made the decision not to continue any heroic procedures. Three days later he died. There was peace on his face. Was Vic healed? Physically, no. Spiritually, beyond any question of doubt. Which was of the most importance? I leave that for you to answer.

We never know how and when God will use sickness, suffering or infirmity for His glory. The supreme example of this is the offering and the sacrifice of His Son Jesus. To the world it appeared to be failure. To the apostles, initially, it was failure. Each returned to his own house following the crucifixion, implying that it was all over. It was a failure to the crowd, who yelled and mocked, “He saved others, he cannot save himself. If he is the king of Israel, let him come down from the cross, and we will believe him” (Matthew 27:42ff RSV). To overcome the sense of failure, the disciples had to look beyond the suffering; and they found the answer in the resurrection that followed—the new life, the risen Christ.

As mentioned earlier, our daughter Faith had a miraculous healing of a cancerous disease that had ravaged her body. Faith had always been, as her mother described, a whining and difficult child. This was in marked contrast to her older brother who always seemed so cheerful and outgoing. When Faith was diagnosed at eight years of age, we began to see a possible connection between her attitudes and her physical condition. Certainly, our attitude toward her responses changed. But, so also did hers. In healing, Faith became a different person—outgoing, caring, concerned about others. A transformation took place. You might say, “When you are feeling better, you act better.” True, but there was more to it than that.

To understand the transformation we need to hear her story. When Faith returned home, following treatment in New York, it was not expected that she would live. We set up a bed in our dining room so she could be near us during the day. We carried her upstairs at night to her own bed. She, at first, would not, or could not, eat. Her nourishment was solely liquids. Though in constant prayer and supported in prayer by friends and parishioners, we were prepared for the worst. We had been told that Faith could not live. But one day she said she was hungry, and from then on she rapidly got better.

Faith walked into church for the first time on Easter Sunday offering her lenten box as an act of thanksgiving. In following trips to New York, the doctors could find no signs of the disease. She had

been healed. Our prayers, and the prayers of many parishioners and friends, had been answered in the way we had hoped.

One night, about a year later, Faith called her mother to come upstairs. “Would you write down this poem for me,” she asked her mother. She then recited these words:

*“I saw a man all dressed in white,
Who was standing in the light,
And in his hand he had a book
On which everyone did want to look.
He had a beard upon his chin
And a glow of warmth about his skin.
Upon his face he had a smile,
And he said to me, “Come and rest awhile—
For you are yet a child you know,
In your ways and in your soul.”*

Betty asked Faith, “What led to those words?” “Because I thought I saw him right over there,” she replied, pointing to a corner of the room where the light from the hall was coming in. She had been touched by the risen Christ.

But the story does not end there. It would seem that the words “Come and rest awhile” were prophetic, for three years later the disease returned. Faith had been exposed to the mumps and somehow it triggered a reoccurrence. The cancer spread rapidly throughout her body, and, involvement of the spine made her totally paralyzed from the waist down. Her condition rapidly deteriorated, with time spent in and out of the local hospital. Physically her body was being ravaged by the disease, but spiritually, emotionally and mentally she continued to grow. I discussed with her about the possibility of dying. “I am not afraid to die, Daddy,” was her reply. One night, when Faith was crying out in pain, I went to her room to pick her up to bring her to our bed. “Daddy, I am sorry to have to bother you,” she said. I hid my tears. What was to be her last night, having been taken to the hospital, Faith encouraged us to go home to

be with her brother Chris, whom she said “needed us.” (He had been suffering with pneumonia.) Two days before she died, lying in a chair under the oak tree in our yard, she wrote the following, which she entitled:

Autumn

*The sun is shining brightly down,
Upon the tree's changing gown.
From green to brown, yellow and red.
Soon all of them will be dead.*

*The flowers are starting to wilt away,
They are so tired from their summer's play,
They'll sleep in the ground all winter long,
And wake in spring to a robin's song.*

*Most birds fly south to warmer lands.
Some fly in flocks that look like hands.
But others stay and bear wind and snow,
From our country they never go.*

*The squirrel hunts around for all kinds of nuts,
And stores them away in their little huts.
For up in the tree her family and nest,
Are always supplied the very best.*

*And we ourselves take out warm clothes,
When cold will strike nobody knows.
Except God up in the sky,
Who is watching ever nigh.*

Was Faith healed? Physically, no. In every other way, yes. Did Betty and I feel a sense of loss? Yes, deep loss. Did we sense victory? Yes. Would we allow what some would call “failure” to make us cynical and hard-hearted? That was a strong temptation. Yet, the experience confirmed our belief in the wonderful healing love of

Jesus. We had come to see this tragedy through the eyes of Faith. After all, that was her name.

Do we question God's healing today because of our own sense of unworthiness? We ask: "Who am I that God would use me? I would be a hypocrite, knowing my own shortcomings and sins, to expect that I could be used by Him." If we feel that way, we are not alone.

Looking at Scriptures, which are God's revelation of Himself to mankind, we soon become aware of the inadequacies of the very people He had chosen. The examples are numerous. Jacob, who was to become Israel, achieved his position through deception. (Genesis 27) The fact that this left scars of guilt and shame upon him is indicated in his reaction later as he was to pass through his brother's land. Jacob was prepared for the worst, but was received with open arms. (Genesis 33) David, the one whom God looked upon from the heart (1 Samuel 16:7), was later to betray God's trust in his encounter with Bathsheba and the death of her husband in battle through intrigue and deception.(2 Samuel 11) The book of Jonah tells us of the disobedient and suffering prophet, who, at first, ran away from God's command, and then was angry when the city of Nineveh was saved through him.

As we turn to the New Testament, the list grows: Peter who denied Jesus (Matthew 26:69ff); James and John who wanted a personal favor at the expense of the others (Matthew 20:20ff); the late comer Paul, who was the Saul who persecuted Christians. (Acts 9) Jesus chose them; and when they were converted, mighty things began to happen through them. But we must also note that our Lord used them in ministry even before they were fully prepared.

Luke 9 and 10 tell us Jesus sent his disciples out two by two. At first the twelve apostles and then later 70 others. What wonderful things happened: the gospel was preached, people were healed, and the 70, when they returned, exclaimed with joy, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name" (Luke 10:17 RSV). "In your name" is the key. They could do nothing of their own power, of their

own strength, or of their own natural gifts. Whatever real gifts they had were given from above.

This is confirmed again on the eve of our Lord's ascension. "Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted." (Matthew 28:16-18 RSV) What followed was the sharing of his authority—all to be instruments of Jesus in proclaiming the message to the world: to go, to make disciples, to baptize and to teach.

This command was not given based on the faith of those hearing it. Some doubted, we remember. It was given for obedience. There is a parallel here to the healing of Naaman which we looked at earlier. He was commanded by Elisha to go and to wash in the River Jordan. He was reluctant at first, in fact, obstinate. It was only as he responded in obedience that he was healed. It was in obedience that they went to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 24:49) God was able to fulfill Himself because they were obedient.

One Saturday afternoon I was in my office. There was a knock at the door. It was a parishioner who had, without warning, lost his job. It had nothing to do with performance. It was a defense cut-back. The irony was that this man had left everything in England to bring his wife and family to Canada on the promise of this job. He was desperate. He was despondent. As he related his utter sense of hopelessness over what had happened, he took out a hand gun and said, "I know how to use this."

I responded, "I believe I know someone who can help you. He is a former naval officer, like yourself. He is also an engineer who is in a related field to yours. I will call him." I picked up the phone, called him, and said, "I need you. Could you come to my office now?" He came. The conclusion of the story was that he was able to help. This fellow former naval officer brought the unemployed man through this difficult time. Eventually the man found a new job in another shipyard in a different community.

Later the parishioner, whom I had called, asked me, “Why did you call me? I have had no experience in dealing with a person in such an emotional state.” My reply simply was, “I needed you.” His response in obedience was the means not only of defusing a very difficult situation, but it was an avenue which led toward a solution. Thankfully, he did not allow his sense of inadequacy to be a roadblock to a healing situation. Yes, when we are called to be obedient, God will provide the means. We may feel inadequate, and so we are, but the true healer is not us, but Him who sends us.

For individual reflection: How many healing miracles have you experienced in your own life, or know about in the lives of others?

For group discussion: How can you encourage those within your community of faith who are in the healing profession (doctors, nurses, counselors, etc.) that God may use them even more effectively through His healing grace? What is God calling you to do—individually and/or as a group—to manifest His healing grace to those around you?

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

If God does heal today, are my problems worth taking to Him? Genesis 1:27 tells us that man was made in the image of God. This means that people have been so created by God that our life can reflect the qualities that we associate with the very nature of God.

As with an image reflected in a mirror, the image is not the object, only a reflection of the object. Hence, take away the object, and we have taken away the image. As Jesus said, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5 RSV).

Paul tells us that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, that the very nature of God can dwell within us. (1 Corinthians 6:19) This does not make us God, but we can become instruments of God's love. Truly, God can work in us and through us.

In considering whether our problems are worth taking to God, we imply that, because of our unworthiness, we are being presumptuous in asking God to take the time to deal with our needs. Most of us, except the extreme egotist, would agree that, individually, we have fallen short of the best. As John writes, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8 RSV). The centurion, who came to Jesus for the healing of his slave, states it well. "When Jesus was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him saying to him 'Lord do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof'" (Luke 7:6-7 RSV). Even though we have been told that we can be recipients and instruments of God's love and of His healing, we are convicted, and continue to be convicted, of our unworthiness.

We can deal with this sense of unworthiness in one of two ways. First, we can deny the fact of being unworthy. This rationalization is achieved by lowering the standards so we no longer feel convicted. Or we say there are no standards, only individual perceptions of what is right or wrong. This may sound great at first. It conveniently does away with any sense of sin; but it does not solve

the problem of conscience, that something deep within us which says, "All is not right." Or, secondly, we can come to that point in our journey when we recognize our own unworthiness and confess our helplessness in being able to change. As Augustine said, "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our heart is restless until it repose in Thee" (*Confessions of Augustine*, p.1).

If we look at healing from God's revealed perspective, we cut through most of the agony and pain which occurs by continual introspection and rationalization. For the Christian, God is a God of history. He is the God who not only created the world but who continues to be operative in His world.

The Greek word *sozo* used in the New Testament refers both to salvation and to healing. "*Salvation*—to save, keep from harm, preserve—the defined ministry of the Savior, Jesus Christ, by the angel Gabriel, but also to heal, to make whole (*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*). An example of *sozo* occurs in Acts. Peter and John confronted a lame man sitting outside the temple begging. Peter commanded, "'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention upon them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'" (Acts 3:1-10 RSV) And he walked. Peter was arrested because of this and, in his defense of the healing of the lame man in the Temple, declared that "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12 RSV).

As we look at the ministry of Jesus we find what *sozo* means to him. The occasion was at the beginning of his ministry. "And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are

oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:16-21 RSV)

I am helped here by the insight of Bishop Arne Rudvin, former Bishop of Karachi and a scholar of Biblical languages, who notes the following: “The Greek word *ptooxois* which we translate as *poor* means *miserable*.” This was an “eye-opener” for me. For *poor* has so often been associated exclusively with the absence of material things. Our social activists have long used this interpretation. Jesus came to preach good news to the *miserable*. All of us have found ourselves at some point, for whatever reason, miserable. This is not a social gospel ministry, as important as that is, but a healing ministry to the miserable.

Secondly, when Jesus spoke of setting at liberty those who are oppressed, the Greek word *tethrausmenous* means *broken*. Jesus’ ministry is to those who have been *broken*. A society that has come to emphasize victimization and would use this word “oppressed” for effect finds little support from those words of Isaiah. The ministry of Jesus is to those who have been broken.(And who has not been broken?) The acceptable year of the Lord is to be proclaimed by sending out broken ones who have been healed through forgiveness.

We have confirmation of the above interpretation of Jesus’ ministry from Jesus himself. The disciples of John the Baptist had been sent to Jesus. They asked Jesus, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” Jesus responded, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the poor (miserable) have good news preached to them.” (Luke 7:18ff RSV) In other words, Jesus was challenging them to evaluate his ministry in terms not only of what he said it would be, but also in actual results. Truly, it is a ministry of wholeness (healing), of salvation proclaimed through preaching the good news.

Three years ago I was asked to visit a veteran who had been sent to the psychiatric division of the local VA hospital. He was sent there for diagnosis and treatment as a consequence of violent behavior, including the use of a gun while being restrained. He was a

police officer, a Vietnam veteran, who had witnessed much dying and violence. His marriage was broken. He was broken. I had never met him before, but there was an almost immediate rapport. I shared with him these words from Jesus as recorded in Luke 4:18-19, speaking of the miserableness, the brokenness and the need for forgiveness. I left that afternoon, after praying with him, promising to return the following Thursday.

When I returned, Andy asked me if he could make a recommitment of his life to Jesus as Lord and Savior. "Of course," I said, and I led him through a profession of faith. Afterwards he said, "May I hug you?" We embraced, unashamed of the tears of joy.

Andy went on to form three small Bible study groups in his wing at the hospital. At the end of the month he was allowed a pass to go to church. He asked me if he could speak to the congregation at church about what had happened to him. He spoke and the people openly accepted him and his message of healing.

Andy was healed, and was released from the hospital weeks before it had been anticipated. He wrote to me, following his release, "Just a few lines to let you know I am well. I miss your visits. The Lord used you to help me through so much pain. I now have such peace within. I'll never be able to thank you enough for coming. The Lord sent you." Truly Jesus heals. He sends out broken ones who themselves have been healed through forgiveness.

"Are my problems worth taking to God?" Of course they are. Anything less would be to deny the very purpose for which He sent His Son to live and die among us. We, like those children Jesus took into his arms, are all precious in his sight.

For individual reflection: What are your personal feelings of worthiness and unworthiness as you seek the Lord's healing in your life? What are the bases for these feelings?

For group discussion: What can you do to help your fellow Christians see that they are worthy of God's healing power? How can

you reach out beyond your faith community to manifest God's healing grace?

OUR IMAGE OF GOD

If my problems are worth taking to God, how do I go about doing it? Reginald Lamb made the observation in his book *The Groundwork of Prayer* that we need a vision of God. In any conversation between two people, it helps if we can see each other. The telephone, as wonderful as it is, cannot be a substitute for being with a loved one or a friend. In the world of business we find executives travelling thousands of miles to have a face to face contact with a colleague or potential customer. Philip, as Lamb pointed out, spoke for all of us when he asked, “Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8 RSV). Jesus himself felt this need in people when he responded to the question by saying, “He who has seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9 RSV). Our daughter Faith had a vision of God when she wrote, “I saw a man all dressed in white, who was standing in the light...” As a consequence, her life was not only changed, but gained an assurance that could never be taken from her. Someone was added to her life, and through her, to us.

Reginald Lamb makes reference to the vision of God in the experience of John Wesley, who “on the twenty-fourth of May, 1738, after attending service in St. Paul’s Cathedral during the afternoon, went on to the Anglican Society in Nettleton Court, conducted by James Hutton, and received that gift of assurance which was never to be taken from him. ‘About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did truly trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.’” (*The Groundwork of Prayer*, p.33)

A number of years ago, I participated in a healing service at a church not far from our home. After giving the address, I invited people to come forward for prayer, for the laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil. There were several prayer stations. One

woman who came forward to where I was standing chose to use that moment to open her heart through confession. As I offered the prayer of absolution, followed by the anointing with oil, something strange and mystical happened. The organ, which had been playing during this part of the service, sounded no longer like an organ, but like a heavenly choir. Then I heard a voice saying: "There is more joy in the kingdom of heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety and nine others who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7 RSV). A moment of eternity had been opened. This woman had been set free from her sins. As with John Wesley, her salvation had been assured.

We may not have such an experience as John Wesley, or Faith, or the woman who came making her confession. Yet all of us need the assurance of God's love. We need a vision of God who is loving, transcendent, real and caring.

In addition to having that kind of vision of God, we need to have faith. As the writer to the Hebrews stated, "He that crieth to God must believe that He is" (Hebrews 11:6 RSV). We do not pray to an "oblong blur," as someone once described God. The vision of God can only become real through faith. As Jesus said to Thomas, "Blessed are those who have not seen but believe" (John 20:29 RSV). Faith is not something which we turn on. It is a gift from God. As Paul wrote, "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3 RSV). And Reginald Lamb wrote: "When man 'discovers' faith, he is only discovering that which God has put in his path to be found.... In other words, faith is not man's invention and achievement, but the gift of the loving Father." (*The Groundwork of Prayer*, p.34-35).

The writer to the Hebrews defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1 RSV). The woman blinded by disease at nineteen who had never lost sight of the Lord, was demonstrating both a vision of God and an abiding faith. Job demonstrated his faith when he said, "I know that my redeemer liveth and that at the latter day he shall stand upon the earth" (Job 19:25 RSV). Again, without that faith, we cannot come to Him.

It is in faith that we bring ourselves to God for healing, for wholeness. It is in faith that we lift others into His presence. It was in faith the four men, who, finding Jesus surrounded by the crowds, carried their friend to the roof, cut a hole, and lowered him into his presence. (Luke 5:19 RSV) In faith, the woman with the issue of blood reached out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. (Luke 8:43 RSV) In faith, the blind man, rebuked by the disciples, cried out to Jesus for healing. (Luke 18:35ff RSV) All these are biblical examples of healing through faith.

One day, in a local hospital, I came across a three-year-old boy whose name was Joshua. He was lying in a fetal position. He looked more like an eighteen-month-old. A nurse was massaging his arms and legs. I asked her what had happened. He had been in an automobile accident a month before and had been in a coma ever since. His mother was upstairs with a broken neck. I asked the nurse if she would join me in prayer for Joshua. Together we prayed.

That was a Friday. I came back the following Monday. Seeing the same nurse massaging Joshua's limbs, I asked her to join me in prayer again. Holding her hand and placing my other hand on Joshua's head, I began to pray. As I prayed, suddenly receiving a gift of discernment, I commanded, in the name of Jesus, that that death wish depart from Joshua. He began to shake his head as if to say, "Leave me alone!" Suddenly, he opened his eyes and moved his arms and legs. He came out of that coma. It was in faith that we came in prayer and it was to that faith that the Lord responded.

It is interesting to note the faith of Joshua of Old Testament days, who was called to lead his people into the Promised Land. It was not to be easy for him or for his people. They could only move forward in faith, in the assurance that God was with them and that His promise would be fulfilled. If we seek healing (salvation) we also need to have faith, always realizing that healing is not of our making, but of our receiving—a gift from God.

Presently, as I write, Betty and I are in the midst of guiding two "Edge of Adventure" series by Keith Miller and Bruce Larson in our home parish. One of the participants had difficulty in

understanding a comment that Bruce Larson made in reference to Alfred North Whitehead's belief that religion runs through three stages if it evolves to its final satisfaction. "It is the transition from God the void to God the enemy, and from God the enemy to God the companion" (John Knox, *Life in Christ Jesus*, p.87).

This might be more difficult for us to understand if we have been brought up in the household of faith, because God has never been a "void" to us. However, if God was "absent" from our earlier experiences, it may well be that our first vision of God is one of being an enemy, because we ourselves have been seated on the throne of life. We are the center of the universe. Anyone who threatens that center is threatening us. It is not until we come to realize that it is by our being the center of that universe that nearly all, if not all, of our problems and difficulties have arisen. Even those of us who have been brought up within the household of faith also have to come to that realization. We need to move from self to God. In so doing God becomes the companion, but, more than that, He becomes the center. To allow this to happen is an act of faith.

For individual reflection: What is your image of God?

For group discussion: On a scale of 1 to 10, what is the "faith level" within your congregation (i.e., are you, or are you not, a congregation in which God's healing power is recognized, accepted and practiced)? What can be done to build up an image of God who is "loving, transcendent, real and caring"?

WHOLENESS

It is in the process of moving from self to God through faith that we become aware of the garbage and baggage that we have been carrying in our lives. An essential part of the healing process acknowledges this, and brings us to our knees in confession. No one who stands in the light can escape the darkness of his own being. In the words of the General Confession in the Episcopal Church, we say, “We confess that we have sinned against Thee in thought, word and deed, by what we have done and by what we have left undone.” (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p.331) These are not empty words, but the words of a contrite heart who truly wants wholeness (healing, salvation). Christ’s healing light brings us out of the darkness of our own soul. In the words of the prologue to John’s gospel, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.” (John 1:4-5 RSV) The light shines. It is not past tense. It is present tense. That light continues to shine.

James, in his epistle, writes: “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16 RSV). Not only do we need forgiveness, but we need healing—healing in terms of ourselves, healing in terms of our relationships broken because of our sins. Those who, having both the vision and the faith, desire to be healed, whether it be physical, psychological or spiritual, need to begin with confession. Mark records Jesus’ words as he began his ministry: “Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent, and believe in the gospel’” (Mark 1:14 RSV). *Repent* means turning, turning from self and looking towards God. To respond to this brings us to our knees, not only once in a lifetime, but time and time again.

A number of years ago, while sharing in a healing service at Shrine Mont, in Virginia, a professional person came forward asking

for healing of his arthritis. As we began to pray, anticipating the laying on of hands with the anointing of oil, I suddenly asked him, “Whom are you angry with?” I did not ask him if he were angry, but with whom he was angry with. This startled him, as it did me, but in a flash of a moment he responded, “My wife.” This led to confession, then absolution and the anointing with oil. What good would it have done to pray for healing while overlooking what was probably the root of his recurring problem—anger.

Anger, also, was the root problem of a couple in my parish who, having been married nearly ten years, had not been able to have children. They had seen many doctors. They had spent thousands of dollars, but to no avail. Several times during that period they had come to me to share their frustration and pain. We had, on each occasion, ended our time together in prayer. This particular time the wife was the one in deep despair, the husband having resigned himself that this would be a childless marriage.

As we talked, I said to the wife, “You are angry at God, even though God has made no promises that there would be children.” Instead of rejecting this observation, she said, “Yes, I am angry.” “What do you need to do?” I asked her. She realized that, whatever was to happen, she needed to confess that anger. She was destroying her relationship with her husband. She was destroying herself.

She confessed as sin that anger against God and her husband. She received absolution. Then she was cut free from the bondage which caused the anger, and delivered from the spirit of anger. Six weeks later, while leaving church, she looked at me with a smile on her face. She said, “I have something to tell you.” From her countenance I knew what it was. “I am pregnant,” she announced. Not only was she pregnant, but when the time came for delivery, she had twins, two healthy children. Yes, God is good.

There is another side to confession and its role in the healing process. We need to accept forgiveness. To do so means that we need, in accepting forgiveness, to forgive ourselves. It is one thing to be offered love, it is another to accept it. The same applies to forgiveness. Some of us have probably confessed the same sin over

and over again. If we have, chances are we have not yet forgiven ourselves. There are some wonderful words spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” (Isaiah 1:18ff RSV) Or, again, with the psalmist: “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:1 RSV) This is the promise of the living God. We need to accept that promise and be able to forgive ourselves as He has forgiven us, and will continue to forgive us.

Lifetime patterns of anger, jealousy, bitterness, and the like (Galatians 5) can so oppress us and bind us so deeply within ourselves that we have grown to live with them. We have grown to accept them as part of who we are. We have rationalized their existence within us. If that is so, we are at the stage of neither thinking that we need forgiveness nor, it follows, of being willing to accept forgiveness.

It is only as we are confronted by a loving and forgiving God that we come to realize a need. This is what happened to the man, who was ill for 38 years, at the pool called Bethzatha. Jesus confronted the man with the question, “Do you want to be healed?” The man began to make excuses, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.” (John 5:2-9 RSV) This, apparently, had been going on for 38 years. Jesus challenged the man and then he decided he really wanted to be healed. The man “took up his pallet and walked.” Jesus is there to restore to wholeness.

A number of years ago I was talking about healing at a conference at Shrine Mont in Virginia. An elderly woman heard about what I had said from her roommate. She sought me out in the sitting room just prior to a noontime meal. “Yes,” I said, responding to her question, “you can be free from the bondage of your past.”

She then related what had happened to her when she was three years old. “I must have done something awful,” she said. “My father punished me by locking me in a closet.” I could see as she related the story that she was carrying a burden from which she had never been set free. She could not forgive herself for the negative feeling that she carried for so many years towards her father. (Are we not told in Scripture to honor our parents? Are we not told in Scripture to love one another?)

Here was a lifetime, less three years, of anger, fear, bitterness, resentment, and, yes, hatred. When she confessed this as sin to God, I was able to assure her of God’s pardon, to cut her free from that incident and to deliver her from the bondage to anger, fear, bitterness, resentment and hatred. In absolving her I asked, “Do you forgive your father? Do you forgive yourself?” Later that day she came to me and said, “It was as if a lump had come out of my chest.”

To be able to forgive yourself is an essential element in the healing process. I believe it can only come about when we are overcome by the blinding light of God’s love which dispels the darkness that keeps that truth hidden from us. Yes, I can be forgiven. Yes, I can forgive myself.

During my ministry at St. Michael’s in Sillery, Quebec, there was an elderly woman who returned to live there. She had no one. She had been divorced in a time that knew little of divorce. She was estranged from her only daughter.

Two of my parishioners, who had known her years previously, assisted her. Because she was confined to her apartment, one purchased her food and the other cleaned. I gave her communion regularly. Her attitude, even toward those who were helping her, was negative. I wondered quietly how long these two loving persons would be able to continue their ministry of grace. They did.

As several years passed, it became evident that, even with assistance, the woman could not continue living alone much longer. Because of her condition I was able to persuade the local retirement home to make a concession, to consider her application early. I remember taking her to the home and showing her what would be

her room. She replied, “I am not coming here.” I mentioned, to no avail, that they would take her only if she were well, but, once there, even if she became ill, they would continue to keep her. She returned to her apartment.

Within a month she had to go to the hospital. She would never return to her apartment. Released eventually from the hospital, she spent her remaining days in an impersonal government facility, where everyone else spoke French. The two faithful ladies continued to visit her. I continued to give her communion.

One Easter Monday, I came to give her the sacrament. As I entered the room, looking across, I saw that she was different. She was surrounded by a glowing warmth. She had, instead of a frown, a smile on her face. As I approached her she said, “I know now why God has kept me alive so long, to show me the awful person I have become.” She had been touched by God’s love. She had been forgiven. She had forgiven herself. A week later she died. I asked those ladies who had been so faithful to her if they had noticed a change. They had. God’s love is so wonderful! We only need accept it. Forgive, be forgiven and accept forgiveness. We do not have to wait 80 years or so to experience it.

Also essential in the process of healing is forgiving others. Jesus makes this point many times in his teaching. In the Lord’s Prayer he says: “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12 RSV). Peter asked Jesus how often we should forgive—“seven times?” (feeling himself generous). Jesus replies, “seventy times seven.” (Matthew 18:21-22 RSV) In fact, this means we must forgive continually.

The elderly woman who had been locked in a closet as a child had to forgive her father before healing could be complete. Corrie Ten Boom’s encounter with one of her former Nazi prison guards many years later convinced her that she had not forgiven him even though she had just finished speaking about forgiveness. In that moment she called upon God for help, and was able to forgive him. A burden had been lifted from her heart.

During another healing conference at Shrine Mont, I was able to share with a deeply despondent woman this need to forgive. For three months she had not spoken a word to her husband even though they were living in the same house. Her heart was a heart of stone. She desperately wanted to be healed. She found peace that day, but only after confession, absolution, and forgiving herself and her husband. She wrote, "It has been nine days since you effected the ministry of reconciliation for me at Shrine Mont. And I'm happy to tell you that the power of absolution has been great indeed. The Lord has taken from me my heart of stone, and 'has given me a new heart and put a new spirit in me'." Yes, to be healed means to be able to forgive.

For individual reflection: To bring greater healing in your own life, is there something you need to confess, someone you need to forgive (including yourself)?

For group discussion: Within your community of faith, how do people go about confessing sin, giving and receiving forgiveness, effecting reconciliation? What can be done to make this more available and more effective?

FREEDOM

The Epistle of James tells us: “Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, in order that you may be healed” (James 5:16 RSV). The exhortation involves others in our healing process. As James writes: “Is any among you sick? 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” (James 5:14 RSV). Most of us are aware of this exhortation in the practical sense. When we are ill, we call for our doctor and rightly so. When the doctor’s advice is combined with prayer for healing, surprising things begin to happen.

The New Testament examples of physical healing are numerous. Jesus healed the blind (Luke 18:41-42), the lame (John 5:1-10), the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 13:10ff), those with leprosy (Luke 17:11-19), the deaf (Mark 7:32). Following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, we find Peter and John at the gate of the Temple speaking to the lame man who anticipated receiving money. Peter said, “I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (Acts 3:6 RSV). Exciting? Yes. Unbelievable? No, if you believe the Lord commanded the apostles to heal the sick. (Luke 9:2) Physical healing was an obvious part of the salvation message. (As we noted earlier, *salvation*, *healing* and *wholeness* all come from the same root word in Greek, *sozo*.)

Most of us can relate accounts of our personal experiences of physical healing. Our daughter Kate was crippled with rheumatoid arthritis while she was in high school. Suddenly, a good athlete had to walk with crutches.

Our family went to Williamsburg on spring break, and each of us took turns carrying Kate on our backs. We continued to pray.

When she reacted badly to one of the drugs she was taking, we took her off all medicine. In a few days Kate recovered fully.

Years later, while living in Venezuela, she called one day to tell us how her knees had that “funny” feeling in them. She told us that she had laid her hands on them in prayer. The pain went away. It has never returned.

Doctors are discovering the power of prayer in healing. Why are we so surprised? This is not only the message of Jesus, but his command. Even when the skills of a doctor are needed, reach out in prayer and surround that person with the love of Jesus. Prayer is truly part of the healing process.

Sometimes physical or psychological illnesses are brought on by spiritual problems. Carl Jung, the famous psychiatrist, once noted that the problems for most of those who came to him after the age of 35 were spiritual in origin. The answer to concerns of the spirit lies in those who discern the Spirit in the body of Christ, the Church.

Obviously, many Christians do not turn to the Christian community for healing. Even for them that would smack of the superstitious. As Jim Glennon reflects, “My own conviction that the main single reason for the lack of those ministries in the Church today, in all their New Testament reality, is that the body of Christ as a whole does not really believe in them” (Jim Glennon, *Your Healing is within You*, p.176). This is in direct opposition to the very example and command of Jesus himself to heal the sick. It is in direct opposition to the gifts of the Spirit which include the gift of healing. It is ironic that many of the hospitals in the United States owe their origins to the vision of the Christian community, but we have come to place our faith exclusively in the product of the vision rather than in the vision itself, Christ the healer.

As I wrote earlier, one of the components necessary for healing is faith—faith in Jesus and faith in his words that “where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20 RSV). There is healing power in the believers coming together in his name. If I can humble myself to my brothers and sisters in Christ as I humble myself to my physician when I note the symptoms of my illness, I can receive healing which touches, not only the body, but the spirit.

One of my parishioners who regularly received communion at home because of a series of strokes, was taken to the hospital. Her husband called me saying, "Al, do you know that Molly is in the hospital? She has been there for three weeks in a coma." I did not know because no one had called, and this had happened a couple of days after I had visited her and given her communion. "I'll be there as soon as possible," I replied.

Entering her room, I was shocked by her appearance. I spoke to her husband, asking questions, and assuring him of my support and concern. I told him I was going to attempt to give Molly communion. "You can't," he replied. "She is in a coma. She can't hear what you are saying, let alone receive communion." "I am going to try," I replied. Turning to Molly, I spoke to her as if she could hear and understand. "Molly, I am going to give you communion...Molly, the Lord be with you." She opened her eyes and replied, "And with Thy spirit." "Lift up your hearts," I said, and she replied "We lift them up unto the Lord." (*The Book of Common Prayer*, p.333) Molly had awakened!

Shortly thereafter she left the hospital for a rehabilitation center, then to a nursing home, and finally back to her own home. Greater things the Lord can do than we can imagine, and He can and does use all of us as members of His body.

Everyone of us has been bruised in one way or another in our journey through life. Some of us may have been bruised in those critical months inside the womb. Some of us may have suffered in the birth process. More and more psychologists are recognizing the impact of the pre-natal experience in our lives. Medically we have become attuned to the influence that drugs and alcohol have on the developing child in the womb.

Recently, we read of the negative, even harmful, effects that phenobarbitol, taken by the mother, have had on the mental development of children. This can be very frightening, not only for the child, but for the mother who feels responsible.

Babies in the womb, we are told, are also affected by the emotional state of the mother. They apparently feel her anxiety, for

example, and are troubled by it. They can hear while in the womb and are soothed by pleasant, contented sounds as well as agitated by harsh and angry sounds.

What the medical profession is beginning to recognize was acknowledged biblically well over 2000 years ago. As the psalmist wrote, “For Thou didst form my inward parts, then didst knit me together in my mother’s womb...Thou knowest me right well; my home was not hidden from Thee, when I was being made in secret...” (Psalm 139:3 RSV). Jeremiah the prophet says this of his personal call from God: “Now the word of the Lord came to me saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations’” (Jeremiah 1:4 RSV). This is heavy stuff.

If we add our pre-natal experiences to our post-natal experiences we accumulate numerous bruises, and reactions to those bruises, in our lives. Many of us consciously or unconsciously hide them, but they continue to grow and fester within us. A motion picture that left a lasting impression on me as a teenager was *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*. It was the account of a man whose life was filled with evil, yet his outward appearance never changed. One day he found in the attic his portrait, which had been painted when he was a young man. It was hideous. In his rage, he slashed the painting, and, as he did, his countenance changed, and his face took on the ugliness born of years of evil living. Like Dorian Gray, we may hide for years the evil within us in the things done and the things left undone, the envies, the jealousies, the lusts, and all those things of the flesh which Paul speaks about in Galatians 5, but when it all catches up, there is an explosion.

Remember my account of the elderly woman in Quebec who refused to go into a retirement community? What happened to her was that her life finally caught up with her. She could figuratively stand apart from herself and honestly look at herself for the first time. She could see what she had become and give it to the Lord, confessing her sin and asking His forgiveness. In a wonderful way she was healed.

Or again, that older woman at Shrine Mont who had been locked in a closet at three years of age, and who came to be delivered from the consequences of that terrifying experience. She was able to confess as sin her reactions to the experience and to receive absolution. She also had to forgive her father.

Both women were “cut free” from the bondage of their experiences. They were cut free “by the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17 RSV). It was God who convicted them of sin and set them free from it. As Paul wrote, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1 RSV). The writer to the Hebrews wrote, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword....and before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Hebrews 4:12ff RSV) As Christians it is in God that we find this freedom.

Sometimes this need to be cut free from a bondage can appear to be a very simple thing. On one occasion a physicist, regarded by his colleagues as brilliant, came to see me. His problem was that he had great difficulty in standing before an audience to deliver a paper. Though he knew his subject matter well, he would be hesitant, stumble over words and be fearful.

As we talked and then prayed together, it was revealed to him that, as a teenager having to give a talk in high school, he was unduly criticized and ridiculed by his teacher. That experience had left its ugly mark; he felt he would never be a public speaker. Combined with fear was the anger, resentment and bitterness towards the teacher. To be healed he needed to confess those feelings as sin, to be absolved, and to forgive that teacher. (Without forgiving the person who has hurt us we cannot be cut free from bondage to that painful situation.) Then, continuing to pray, in the name of Jesus he was cut free from the bondage to that experience, and delivered from the spirits of anger, resentment and bitterness.

In Galatians 5:19-21 NIV, Paul says: “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious.” The list following includes anger, strife, impurity

and the like. We can be oppressed, held down. Webster's dictionary defines *oppressed*: "to burden spiritually as if with weight, to weigh down." This man was weighted down by his reaction to what he had experienced. He had allowed the spirits of anger and resentment and fear to get a hold in his life. He had to be cut free, in the name of Jesus, from that bondage. And he was. Like the woman who said, "It was as if a lump had come out of her chest," he was cut free. But he also needed to be delivered, rescued from that evil.

In coming to Christ for healing, we need to know and to accept that we can be delivered (set free) from our sins. In the Episcopal Church we have the words of the absolution in our liturgy (*Book of Common Prayer, p.332*). We have just made our confession, we have acknowledged our sins, and now the priest pronounces the absolution. "Almighty God, our heavenly Father, who of His great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all those who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto Him, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ."

We have gone to God in the presence of His community asking for forgiveness. We have received assurance of pardon through that community, and we have also had the assurance that we have been delivered from all our sins. To *deliver*, according to the Webster Dictionary, means "to be liberated, given over, set free from restraint, to rescue from evil, actual or feared." We have been set free. Jesus sets us free, but he uses those who love him as his visible agents.

I have labored this point of trusting the Christian community because, in fact, many of us do not. "Religion is a personal matter," many of us reply. We hide behind this assumption in a manner which would appear ridiculous if we used it in a visit to a physician or therapist. Until we can overcome this reluctance, we cannot find the wholeness we seek. We need to trust, to be open to, that community to which the healing message of God has been entrusted. Paul pointed out that all gifts, including the gift of healing, are for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7 RSV)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 RSV). The loving, healing Jesus of Nazareth commanded his apostles to continue that healing ministry that he had begun. The ministry continues to this day in spite of doubts, cynicism, and intellectual unbelief. Jesus said to his followers, “The harvest is plentiful” (Matthew 9:37 RSV). It is plentiful today. You, too, can be an instrument of his healing.

For individual reflection: Has your view of God’s healing grace changed in any way as a result of this study? In what way or ways? How can this benefit your life?

For group discussion: What can be done to bring about a full ministry of healing within your congregation? What would that ministry involve? Who should be involved? To what extent are you willing to be used by God as a part of this ministry?

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