



Healing and Wholeness

Lenten Study

Day 1

Introduction

At a major church conference, there was much discussion about evangelism. How can we most effectively reach people with the “good news” of Jesus Christ? The whole tenor of the conference shifted abruptly when one of the main speakers said, with conviction, “The common denominator out there (in the world and in the church) is pain.”

The ministry of healing was clearly a significant part of Jesus’ method of proclaiming the “good news.” As his followers, we, too, should see that healing and wholeness are desperately needed in a world filled with pain.

For our 40 days of Lent we will study “Healing and Wholeness.” The writers for this series are people who have been actively involved in various aspects of the healing ministry.

The first 10 lessons, including today’s, are on the subject “Principles of Spiritual Healing,” taken from the Old and New Testaments. In the next 10 we will look at specific examples of Jesus’ healing ministry under the subject “Jesus Heals.” The following 10 lessons are on “Healing in the Early Church.” The study concludes with the final 10 teachings on “Penitence, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation,” an especially pertinent subject to take us through Holy Week to Easter.

As we begin this Lenten venture together, may we be particularly mindful of the healing and wholeness God wants for us, for our church and for the world.

R&D In what ways has Christ healed you?

Prayer: You, O Lord, are a Mighty Healer and we are a world in desperate need of Your healing touch.

Day 2

Read: Exodus 15:22-26

The Divine Relationship

The principles of spiritual healing lie in our relationship with the healer. God says: Listen to me; choose right living; obey my commandments; practice holiness... and I will protect you (v.26). In that covenant relationship God reiterates, “I will be your God; you will be my people” (Exodus 6:7).

God had intervened and delivered the Israelites from the cruel hand of Pharaoh. “How could they forget so quickly?” How soon we forget God’s goodness when the sting of pain and despair press hard on our present reality. In the earlier verses of this chapter of Exodus, the rescued Israelites sang songs of praise (vv.1-21) proclaiming God’s sovereignty and brilliant strategy in providing escape from Egyptian bondage. But, like overindulged children, their first disappointment turned into a tantrum.

Once again, the Lord intervened and delivered the people from thirst and fear of abandonment. It is God’s character to love and rescue, and His determination to do so transcends our

limited vision for ourselves; His principles of relationship are for our protection, not punishment—to “guide us waking and guard us sleeping” (*Book of Common Prayer*).

We cannot love God with one part of ourselves and love some other god with another part of our being and come to health and wholeness in our personalities. Double mindedness robs commitment of resolve and energy. God created us for relationship with Him only. Our society produces compelling mini-gods, so abundant it is difficult to choose. English writer Selwyn Hughes said the “divided loyalty in the soul leads to disease in the inner being and disintegration in the personality.” He suggested that the core of what psychiatrists call neurosis is a failure to give absolute surrender to the one true living God.

R&D Is there any part of your life you are withholding from God?

Prayer: Take me, Lord; I am Yours.

Day 3

Read: 1 Kings 17:17-24

God’s Purpose Made Manifest

There is, in our day, great interest in spirituality, which can mean anything from defining one’s self with the cosmos, mysticism, witchcraft, or other spiritual pursuits. Especially in time of crisis, people tend to seek something “meaningful, lasting, and real”—vague words to describe an antidote for filling the emptiness of the soul. Our world of many gods offers choices (materialism, sensual satisfaction, esoteric intellectualism, and so forth) that ultimately deceive the heart’s desire for wholeness and health.

Elijah was sent to the woman in today’s story. A Gentile, she learned from Elijah that God called His people to lead holy lives and to obey His commandments. Therefore, it was a natural conclusion that when her son became ill, she would assume God was punishing her for unrepentant sin. Whom God chooses to heal and why is a mystery. (I’ve heard many say that’s the first question they’ll ask of the good Lord when they meet Him in heaven.) Like the healing of the blind man described in John 9:3, this healing seems to have been a godly intervention for the specific purpose of faith-building.

What is significant to the miracle is the woman’s understanding that the God of Elijah was the worker of wonders. She had seen God’s power made manifest through Elijah (vv.12-16) and called upon him, “O man of God,” in her fear and distress. Elijah responded. The exquisite relationship between God, Elijah, and the woman changed forever. God’s response to the woman’s faith made her witness for the Lord (v.24). Even today we are touched by this mighty act of faith and restoration.

R&D Do you know someone God has healed? What was the response? How does it affect your faith?

Prayer: When illness strikes, help us to remember, Lord, that You are the first source of help.

Day 4

Read: 2 Kings 4:18-37

Heart for God

The Elisha stories read much like the Gospels because the prophet was involved in the lives of the people. He was deeply interested in their daily needs and sorrows, a man of heart. Like Jesus, Elisha was constantly moved with compassion and used his godly powers to banish pain, bring hope, courage, and cheer into the lives of troubled people.

There was a kinship of souls between the Shunammite woman and Elisha which cut across wealth, status, or gender. When the woman's son died quite suddenly, she took his body to Elisha's room, laid him on the bed, shut the door and left to find the man of God. Elisha took pity on her and "lay upon the lifeless body, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hand upon hand and stretched himself upon the child. And the flesh of the child waxed warm" (v.34). With God's power within him, Elisha stretched himself to pour his life into the dead child to give life-to-life resuscitation. Only eternal God can bring new life.

The phrase "to stretch" oneself has gained popular usage. It means pushing one's self beyond usual ability. Our Lord "stretched out his arms upon the hardwood of the cross, and offered himself in obedience to God's will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world." But spiritual stretching is not accomplished with willpower but by the grace of God's power. Only life can restore life. Being open to relationship and fellowship with God and His holy people releases the flow of spiritual power which heals sick souls and bodies.

R&D Have you ever confronted God, asking or demanding a response? In relationship with Him we can do that.

Prayer: You would "stretch" us, Lord, to reach the needs of others.

Day 5

Read: 2 Kings 5:1-19

A Pagan General Obeys God

In the three previous stories we see how God intervened through Moses, Elijah, and Elisha in established relationships with the people. The healing of Naaman demonstrates God's strategy which goes beyond the confines of His chosen people, foreshadowing His intention of making Himself known to all mankind.

Naaman was the brilliant and powerful military commander in chief of the Syrian army. Though a noble pagan and a leper, God favored him with success. A figure whose presence commanded attention, yet, his flaw could not be hidden. No worldly application could heal his dreaded disease.

The mighty God of Israel chose to reach into the conqueror's life by way of a simple captured Hebrew slave girl. She told Naaman of Elisha, God's miracle worker. The general understood discipline and authority and went through established channels until he reached Elisha's door, loaded with gifts, according to custom.

He expected to be received personally and publicly healed by the hand of the great prophet of God. Instead, he was dismissed by a messenger and told to go wash in the unimpressive Jordan River. Rebuffed, insulted, and angry, Naaman almost went home, but his officers convinced him to forego his position and pride and follow Elisha's explicit instructions (vv.11-13). He did and was healed—physically and spiritually (v.14).

It is humbling to have to submit ourselves to the healing ministry of others in order to find wholeness, but God calls us to be dependent upon the spiritual gifts of one another (1 Corinthians 12).

R&D *When have you had difficulty in submitting to the ministry of another?*

Prayer: *Lord, give me the boldness to reach out to others in need.*

Day 6

Read: 2 Kings 20:1-8

God Crosses Boundaries to Answer Prayer

In the days of Hezekiah, the average person would not have had a conversation with God. Holy God of the Hebrews delivered messages through the prophets as He did when He told Isaiah that King Hezekiah was fatally ill. As king of Israel, Hezekiah would be anointed by God through Isaiah and therefore he would have a special relationship with the Lord. So speaking directly to God, turning his face to the wall to shut out distractions, he prayed to the Lord for his life.

We can hear the depth of his fear of isolation from God in Hezekiah's sobs. The promise of eternal fellowship with the Lord was not in current Hebrew thought, but he might hope to gain God's blessing with a full life span because he followed God's laws faithfully. God heard his plea, responded to his pain, healed him, expelled the national enemy, and gave him a supernatural sign (vv.5-6).

It is interesting to note that medical practice comes under God's blessing as the use of figs for a poultice suggests. Notice too that Isaiah, not Hezekiah, received the message, confirming the promise of 15 more years and the overthrow of Assyrian dominance. Both miracles glorify the graciousness and power of God. Raymond Calkins writes that God is "a free moral agent at the heart of the universe, a self-governing and self-determining personality possessing freedom and initiative, not controlled but in a real sense controlling and operating it: not limited by its laws except in so far as he chooses to be limited by them...yet always governing according to the principles of his being."

R&D *Which do you think comes first—a spiritual or a physical healing?*

Prayer: *Lord, You heal in so many different ways in so many different situations. I hold You in awe!*

Day 7

Read: Matthew 10:1-8

Employed for Kingdom Come

In the Old Testament, God began revealing healing and wholeness through Moses, Elijah, Elisha and others. He equipped them with His power to work miracles and to call His people to obedience to honor the one true sovereign God whose kingdom would never end.

The New Testament reflects a more intimate relationship with Father God made possible through His Son Jesus and those chosen to help extend the kingdom of God. Disciples were mostly Jewish followers who were drawn to Jesus and his message of love, acceptance, and salvation. They learned about the character of God by watching the Son and the things he did.

Out of the many who trained at his side, Jesus entrusted 12 to go out of the comfort of the “classroom” to begin their ministry, to do what they had seen the teacher do.

Trained missionaries know that cross-cultural evangelism takes special skill and training. There are many pitfalls encountered in preaching to people who have a different language, cultural background, or world view. The disciples were not yet experienced to preach to pagan Gentiles, and the Samaritans’ view of Yahweh was primitive. According to God’s command, Jesus dispatched his newly trained and empowered evangelists to where they would experience some success and not get discouraged. It is incumbent upon us to seek the necessary training to learn how to share Christ beyond our church doors.

R&D What was special about the disciples that they could be effective evangelists? What do you have in common with them?

Prayer: Knowing You, Lord, is all we need in order to share Your love with others.

Day 8

Read: Matthew 17:1-13

Jesus’ Authority Confirmed

Our generous, loving God cares so much for us. He doesn’t give up. He remembers His covenant with His people and continually tries to reach us, to bring us into reconciliation and wholeness with Himself. After delivering His people from bondage in Egypt, God gave them the Law through Moses—the means by which to be holy. Then, by way of the prophets, represented by Elijah, He sent warnings of the consequences of disobedience and called for repentance. Finally, God sent His beloved Son to show us His love in all of its fullness.

When Jesus took Peter, James, and John to the mountain, God showed the disciples the continuity of His love and commitment. Standing before them were Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus, then there stood Jesus alone—transfigured. The holy trio encompassed the spiritual heritage and promise of Israel. Our understanding of Jesus must also embrace his spiritual roots. These disciples who had walked with the Son of Man were given God’s assurance that Jesus was the promised one—the Messiah. God’s voice heard above the cloud announced, “This is my beloved son...listen to him.”

The covenant relationship which began with Abraham takes on a renewing dimension as we, each one, experience the inward transfigured relationship with Jesus. “I believe in your Son,” is the response God seeks from you and me.

R&D Do you remember when you first knew that Jesus was the Son of God?

Prayer: You have transfigured my life, Lord; may others see You in me.

Day 9

Read: Matthew 4:1-11

Deadly Disbelief

When Jesus was with his disciples, training them, preaching, healing the sick—physically and spiritually—and rescuing men and women from sin and darkness, he made it clear that the enemy was Satan. During bouts with the enemy, Jesus called upon the authority of God’s word to sustain him. God was faithful, sending angels to minister to him after the battle was won (v.11).

Today there is another battle going on. It is fueled by arrogance and unbelief, with a line of propaganda which says that healing for physical and spiritual wholeness by prayer was meant for a more primitive age; that science is finding the answers; advanced medicine will soon alleviate physical suffering; and social adjustments will ease other kinds of pain.

The idea put forth is that the authority and power of God are not viable when science and nature are in control; suggesting further that modern high-tech civilization will serve the spiritual condition of men and women. This line of reasoning is the temptation of our present age.

Resisting the temptation to disbelief brings spiritual wholeness. This wholeness comes at some mystical moment of self-yielding and repentance, when holy God touches our points of pain, brokenness, and disobedience. “Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

R&D Does pride get in the way of repentance? How?

Prayer: Awaken us, Dear Lord, against the complacency of our time.

Day 10

Read: Luke 7:18-23

Love's Action Is Proof

The God who loves us sent the Son to free us from all that would keep us in bondage and prevent us from spiritual wholeness and a loving relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The evidence of His love for us and His desire for that love to be returned is ultimately realized in the life-giving works of Jesus (v.21). Is Jesus really who he says he is? John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”

Many today are still looking for a guru to give their life true meaning. Does Jesus really have the power to redeem us, to make us clean, and to give us victory over the things that are killing us? When confronted, Jesus demonstrated his healing, life-giving power for those who suffer with physical pain and in spiritual darkness. What Christ did then, and does now, is integrate persons, mending brokenness and transforming personalities so that new life may enter in and operate freely (2 Corinthians 5:17). The God who heals us, loves us not because we deserve it, not always because we have great faith, not necessarily because we will appreciate it or show gratitude, or serve Him nobly. He heals us because it is in His character to want us to be wholly His. It is in our brokenness that He calls us to be healed.

R&D What principles of spiritual healing have you derived from the study thus far?

Prayer: You heal, Lord, because it is Your nature to heal.

Day 11

Read: Matthew 4:18-25

Jesus Heals

From the outset of Jesus' ministry, the coming of the kingdom of God, as reported in Matthew's Gospel, is confirmed by “signs”—the healings by Jesus of all those in need.

The first four disciples are chosen and called. Peter, James, John, and Andrew drop everything and immediately get up and follow him! The whole of Galilee is the setting for the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. From the first, three aspects are emphasized-teaching, proclaiming the

“good news,” healing. Miraculous healings confirm the dawning a new day as proclaimed by the man from Nazareth. The prophet Isaiah foretold that the Messiah would have the power to heal (Isaiah 61:1).

Jesus’ teaching (revelation of God’s true nature), proclaiming the “good news” (the new beginning for man), is thus confirmed, validated by his power to cure all kinds of diseases and sickness among the people. Jesus healed them all—not only the Jews! As his fame spread across the Jordan, people came to him from Gentile areas—the ten cities of the Decapolis, including Damascus. And Jesus never refused to heal. Obviously, his messiahship is intended for all.

So, from the very beginning of his ministry the inclusive nature of Jesus’ love and compassion is demonstrated. As we seek to follow him, we are reminded that our love and compassion must be for all. There must be no boundaries to Christian vocation for us. We must serve all in need—despite differences of race, religion, origin.

R&D Is there a formula, perhaps, for present day evangelism outlined in this text? If so, what is it?

Prayer: Help me, Lord, to reach out to others regardless of the ways in which they seem different from me. We are all the same in Your eyes.

Day 12

Read: Matthew 8:1-4

Unclean

Matthew’s account of Jesus’ healing ministry in the eighth chapter of his Gospel is the first of six significant miracles in this chapter. Jesus has just come down the mountain following his teaching that we call the Sermon on the Mount. Large crowds continue to follow him.

Perhaps there can be found no other example so representative of society’s castoff, down-and-out, homeless, scorned, reviled, and dirty person than the leper in Jesus’ time. And such a one somehow makes his way to Jesus in spite of the pressing crowd. It is as if the leper stands in judgment of society’s scorn and nature’s unfairness as he speaks words to Jesus, at once of faith, and of doubt: “Sir, if you want to, you can cure me.” Then, amazingly, and in the sight of all present, for the leper was “unclean” under the Law, Jesus touched him and said, “Of course I want to. Be cured.” And instantly he was cleansed.

Jesus admonishes the man to tell no one, “but go and show yourself to the priest and make an offering prescribed by Moses as evidence for them.” The purification of a former leper is spelled out in Leviticus 14:1-32. It was a requirement for the former leper before he would be permitted to return home to family and community—no longer an outcast. But Jesus ministered to him when he was an outcast, “unclean.”

As one meditates on this passage from Matthew, our present day Christian service comes into comparison. Are we ministering to the outcasts, the castoffs of society? Are we willing to touch them, to do what we can to restore them to wholeness? Jesus’ ministry judges us, doesn’t it? Or do we judge ourselves?

R&D What is an important single lesson to be found in this passage?

Prayer: You touched, Lord Jesus, regardless. I hunger for your touch when I am in need, and I know I can count on it.

Day 13

Read: Luke 5:17-26

Forgiveness and Healing

The author of the Gospel of Luke was a physician committed by his profession, his training, and knowledge to heal whenever possible. Thus, it is not difficult to understand his Gospel's emphasis on Jesus' power to heal all manner of human ills by spiritual means.

Luke tells of a series of healings and of the resultant and increasing controversies raised between Jesus and religious leaders of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem.

For the Jews of Jesus' time, sin and illness were inseparably linked. If a person was sick, he had sinned. Thus, Jesus begins the healing process by telling the paralytic that his sins are forgiven; otherwise, the man might not believe he could be healed. Jesus had his detractors on the horns of a dilemma: they would object to his claiming to be able to forgive the man's sins; but if he was healed, that was proof that his sins were forgiven.

As the drama of Jesus' ministry of healing unfolds, doctors of the Law and other religious leaders come from a wide area to investigate the young rabbi from Nazareth of Galilee about whom they have heard so much. And when they hear his words, "Your sins are forgiven," they are shocked and angered. For only God can forgive sins. Of course, they cannot know that Jesus is God—God in the flesh!

As the crowds continue to increase in numbers, so does the corporate faith. "Seeing their faith...Jesus healed the paralytic." Faith held by the men who carried the paralytic and let him down through the roof, perhaps faith of the paralytic, and faith of some in the crowd who were beginning to recognize that God works through the young rabbi from Nazareth.

The man walked home, "glorifying God," a reminder to all that we also should witness to the wonders He works in us.

R&D What are some of the ways in which God has worked in your life?

Prayer: Lord, I pray for more Christian doctors...ones through whom healing can come both by their conscientious exercise of their training and their knowledge that healing comes from You.

Day 14

Read: Luke 7:1-10

Healing at a Distance

Luke's telling of the healing of the centurion's servant, through the intercession of Jewish elders, is different from Matthew's version of the story (Matthew 8:5-13). Matthew makes no mention of the elders.

It is noted that at this time, many synagogues welcomed Gentiles (pagans) to come and worship with them—to learn about the one God—the God of Israel. In a true sense, this was evangelism! Apparently, the centurion, a Roman officer, was one of those known as a "God-fearing" Gentile, perhaps even a prospect for conversion. At the very least, he was sympathetic and involved for, "he is the one who built the synagogue."

We see the centurion story as a foreshadowing of the recognition of Jesus by great numbers of Gentiles. And through him, multitudes will come to know and to love the God of Israel. Perhaps Luke's account intends to make this point for the proselytes to come. It is clear that the centurion

recognizes Jesus' spiritual authority, even over him. This, despite his authority as a Roman officer, over all the Jews of his jurisdiction under Roman law.

From the earliest days of written Eucharistic liturgy, the words of the centurion have been frequently repeated. As the priest elevates the bread and wine following the consecration he says, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou should come under my roof. But speak the word only and my soul shall be healed."

We need to remember that God is not limited to time and space. We, too, may heal and be healed, though not present, where the words of Christ-centered prayers of intercession are spoken. Jesus was not in the centurion's house. But it was his prayer and the faith of the centurion that restored the servant to perfect health.

R&D Recall an instance in which your healing prayers were answered for someone far away.

Prayer: Many in need of healing should be on our intercessory prayer lists, Lord, because there are always those in need of healing.

Day 15

Read: Luke 7:11-23

Resurrection

Nain was a town about six miles southeast of Jesus' home of Nazareth. Outside the east gate there was a cemetery. It was Jewish custom to bury late in the very day of death. This is the story of the Lord of life—Jesus "healing" the young victim of premature death, restoring his life and healing the stricken widowed mother of her overwhelming suffering over the loss of her only son.

Of course, Jesus is motivated by compassion. The young rabbi from Nazareth, the neighboring village, is seen as one who calls forth the living from the dead! The miracle is the sign that the man from Nazareth is most certainly a prophet—that God has visited His people. The conclusion: God has intervened on this wondrous occasion. The people are filled with awe!

The Christian today, as he reads this account, cannot help but see the significance; the resurrection of the young man from the dead—restoring the son to his grief-stricken mother—proves that the very heart of God aches with our pain. It is a lesson for our faith. Life comes through Jesus Christ!

As Jesus' fame spreads throughout Judea, John the Baptist sends the inquiry, "Are you the one to come?" Jesus' answer, in substance, is "Yes." He refers to the prophecies of Isaiah regarding the signs which will accompany the Messiah, the anointed one (Isaiah 26:19, 35:5-6, 61:1). The signs are of healing. Jesus says, "Go back and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised...."

R&D What healing do you see Jesus doing today through his Church?

Prayer: Today, there are so many "dead" to you, Lord Jesus; inspire us to reach them in your name.

Day 16

Read: Luke 8:40-56

Double Healing

Scholars have estimated that Jesus spent a majority of his three-year public ministry—perhaps over 80 percent—healing people sick in mind, body, or spirit. Thus, those who know Jesus to be the Son of God conclude, of course, that God wishes all of His children to be free of illness, pain, premature death. This passage in Luke tells of two women miraculously healed in a single account.

On his return to Galilee, Jesus is welcomed by a large crowd. Suddenly, a man falls down at Jesus' feet. He pleads for Jesus to come to his house where his 12-year-old daughter is near death. His faith in Jesus' power to heal humbles the synagogue official, brings him to his knees. In this moment of the divine drama, amidst the stifling, crushing crowd, another finds her way to him. She merely touches the fringe of Jesus' cloak behind him and she is immediately cleansed of a female disability she has had for over 12 years (unclean, therefore, under Jewish law). All the administrations of physicians had failed in the past to cure her condition. But from the moment she touches Jesus she is healed (made clean). And the Lord says to her, "My daughter, your faith has restored you to health." Faith is also the key to Jesus' healing of Jairus' daughter. As Jesus speaks to the woman, a messenger from Jairus' home bursts on the scene to say that the synagogue official's daughter has died. Jesus says to Jairus, "Do not be afraid, only have faith and your daughter will be safe."

Here is demonstrated yet another example of the importance of faith as we seek wholeness, our well-being of mind, body, and spirit. It is our faith in the living God, faith in our prayers, faith in His loving response that heal us and bring us release from our fear and our anxiety.

R&D How do we find our way to Jesus when we are in need of healing?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, reach beyond the healing of my body and heal my soul as well.

Day 17

Read: Luke 10:1-9

Followers Empowered

In this passage from Luke's Gospel, we may see the "72 others" representative of Christ's followers today. We believe the Lord sends us forth in advance, to prepare the way for him. So many do not know him. For this reason, the story is especially significant.

First, it is clear that one qualification for the follower to be sent is faith, to trust in the Lord. For the Lord says, "Carry no purse, no haversack (not even an extra pair of shoes)." Trust him to supply essential needs.

Then, ours is also a time of urgency. The harvest is ready, the laborers are few. So, "Salute no one on the road." It was the custom for the Jewish traveler to stop and visit with fellow Jews while on the road. Jesus emphasizes the urgency of the mission to which the follower has been called.

Finally, as in the mission of the 12 (Luke 9:1-6), it seems clear that the 72 are empowered by Jesus to heal—an extension of his healing ministry. And once more we see the triune nature of Jesus' ministry of healing. The 72 are instructed to pronounce God's peace to all those who will listen, heal those in need, and proclaim, "The kingdom of God is very near."

Luke's account of the commissioning of the 72, and the 12 (Luke 9:1-6), are foreshadowings of the Christian followers' ministry to which we have all been called. It is of the utmost importance to remember, however, that we are participating, as his followers, in his ministry. It is the risen Christ, through us, who continues to heal, make whole, redeem and restore, as we proclaim the "good news" and teach in his Spirit and truth. It has been thus, and yet continues, from the beginning of the Christian church (see Acts 2:42-43).

R&D *Do you believe our time is as urgent as it was in the past? Why?*

Prayer: *Send us out every day, Lord Jesus, empowered as the 72, to prepare the way for you.*

Day 18

Read: Luke 13:10-17

Healing Compassion

Jesus never refuses to heal. He heals even when he is not asked to do so. Here is such a case—yet another example of the depth of God's concern, His love and compassion for the suffering as demonstrated by Jesus' healing of the woman paralyzed for 18 years.

The story also stresses the chasm between the synagogue official's literalist interpretation of the Law, held by many religious leaders of the day, and Jesus' understanding of that Law (Deuteronomy 5:14). For Jesus, releasing the poor woman from her long suffering supersedes the injunction not to do any work on the Sabbath. The "Law of love" takes precedence.

And so, the rabbi from Nazareth is viewed as disrespectful of established, traditional religious practice. Other such examples will result in increasing antipathy to Jesus' teaching among many powerful religious leaders. Eventually, they will lead to his arrest and crucifixion.

Jesus always demonstrates his compassion for those in need; he never fails to heal or to forgive. As the Son of God, he reveals God's true nature. Most especially, Jesus' healings prove God is a God of love and mercy and compassion, not a God of wrath, punishment, and vengeance.

Alleviating suffering, responding to the needs of others, may place us one day in a situation when we must make a choice. Jesus teaches that compassionate response, notwithstanding time and place and other demands, should take precedence. Jesus never says, "Come back tomorrow. I'll heal you then."

R&D *When has your own timetable prevented you from ministering to another in need?*

Prayer: *Indeed, the "Law of love" always takes precedence, Lord.*

Day 19

Read: John 5:1-19

"Do You Want to Be Well?"

Evidently, here is seen another example of long-suffering. The transgression, perhaps, is something habitual, for Jesus says to him, "Now you are well again, be sure not to sin any more, or something worse may happen to you" (vv.14-15).

Whatever the sickness, it is very real; the man is disabled. And Jesus' question brings him face-to-face with his sin, in this instance, the reason for his illness.

We see Jesus' ability to look into an individual's very heart and soul. He understands the cause of the man's illness. He challenges him: "Do you want to be well again?"

Here's a common problem. Sometimes we do not really want to give up that which we know to be wrong, because we find pleasure in it. But it is essential to do so if our quest for healing and wholeness is to succeed. Another possibility frequently found in our human condition comes to mind. We are familiar with the sick persons who really do not wish to be well because they enjoy the attention their illness brings them from family and friends and the power it gives them over their loved ones. The question remains, "Do you want to be well again?"

In this passage, Jesus speaks of God as his own Father. Jewish authorities view this as ultimate blasphemy. Thus, they become even more firm in their intent to kill him.

But like Moses, Jesus does not seek his own glory, rather, only the salvation of God's people (Exodus 32-34). "I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees the Father doing, and whatever the Father does the Son does too."

R&D Are there any barriers standing in the way of your healing and wholeness?

Prayer: Reach, Lord, into those unexpected places to reach those unsuspecting people.

Day 20

Read: John 9:1-41

Born Blind

John's account of the man born blind attests to the religious distortion, the spiritual sickness of many religious leaders, "blindness" of those in power. Again, the setting is the Sabbath. True, the blind man could have been healed on another day. But to Jesus the Sabbath is a symbol of new beginning, a new age in God's creation: "As long as the day lasts I must carry out the work of the one who sent me; the night will soon be here when no one can work" (v.4).

Of particular interest is Jesus' comment that "the man was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him." Is it possible that our infirmity might be an opportunity to glorify God? Certainly, we are, all of us, something less than completely whole. Thus, our healing may be the means for us to witness, as the man born blind, "I was blind and now I see!"

Some of the Pharisees said of Jesus, "This man cannot be from God: he does not keep the Sabbath." Others said in disagreement, "How could a sinner produce signs like this?" Unresolved dichotomy causes people to think. Jesus' ministry most surely does this.

The revelation of the true light thus enfolds for the man born blind. First, he sees Jesus simply as a man who heals. Then, he is a prophet, for a sinner cannot do such works. So, he must be a prophet from God. Now, he is forced to make a decision: stay in the synagogue, secure and safe, or reach out in witness and faith! As he thus responds, he is led to know the Son of Man, "the light of the world." And the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshipped him!

R&D What is the role of praise and thanksgiving in the healing process?

Prayer: Lord Christ, your Church is filled with those who can honestly say, "I was blind, and now I see."

Day 21

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-13

Unity in Diversity

In this letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul described in detail the gifts that God from His unlimited bounty gives to each individual, singly or severally. These charismata or richly varied graces are not intended solely for personal possession or personal gratification but rather for the common good, the building up of the Body of Christ. We are not to value any one gift above the others for all are equally God-given according to His beneficence and each is an essential part of the whole without which the Body would be incomplete. Just as in a human body all parts must perform their functions fully in order to be healthy, so must each person, as part of the Body of Christ, perform his function or ministry according to the special gift received for that purpose.

In the church today, we are witnessing a new awareness of these gifts and our responsibility to identify them for use in Christian ministry to the glory of God.

Each gift has many ramifications and can be put to service in a multitude of ways. This is particularly discernible in the birth and growth of a new congregation. Needs of all kinds are great and everyone must give freely of time, energy, skills, and talents. Faith, the ability to help actualize the spiritual, is the keystone of a Christian community. Likewise wisdom which comes from close communion with God and knowing Him comprehensively; and its sister gift of knowledge, the practical application of wisdom to human life and affairs, are of signal significance. All areas of healing, particularly in relationships, are of eminent consequence in the church. These are but a few of God's gifts given us for use in service to Him. In Christ all diverse gifts find unity as we each seek to be the hands, the feet, the voice to carry on his work in the world and to be components of his body on earth.

R&D Have my spiritual gifts been identified? And how have I sought to use them in service to the Lord?

Prayer: O God, you want each of us to be Christ to the world around us, and we cannot do that without being empowered by Your spiritual gifts

Day 22

Read: James 5:12-16

A Classic Text

This passage from the letter of James has become the classic text on spiritual healing. Christianity here is seen as a healing religion; Christ, a healing Savior. So interwoven are his redemptive mission and healing ministry that they cannot be separated. He brought health and salvation, deliverance from anything that alienates man from God. Throughout the New Testament we find Jesus devoting a large portion of his ministry to healing brokenness of body, mind, and spirit, and restoring wholeness.

A national church report once stated: "Over and over again, wherever the church is faithful in her specific ministry of healing, there is unmistakable evidence of the power, the flaming faith, and the total commitment, which were characteristic of the early church." So vibrant was the healing ministry in the church at that time that countless healings occurred and were regarded as the norm rather than extraordinary events. Then these incidents gradually diminished due to a variety of circumstances. The first wave of enthusiasm in the church has lost some of its luster, due at least in part to its becoming comfortable as it was more widely accepted as the respectable, normal

thing. Comfort too often gives birth to apathy! Also, as medical science began making great strides ahead, people turned more to that instead of to religion for healing. Little was expected to happen in the church—and consequently little happened.

However, in comparatively recent times the healing ministry, too long overlooked and relegated to relative obscurity, has been restored to its historic place as both ministry and sacrament. According to Dr. Martin Israel, Anglican priest and physician, “Healing is not a patchwork repair; it is the re-creation of something that has strayed from the image that God originally conceived.”

R&D In what specific instances of illness have you sought anointing and prayer for healing?

Prayer: Awaken Your Church, Lord, to a vibrant healing ministry.

Day 23

Read: Acts 3:1-10

The Power of Jesus’ Name

Jewish day began at 6 o’clock in the morning and ended at 6 o’clock in the evening. For the devout Jew there were three special times of prayer during the day. Although it was agreed that prayer was efficacious at any time and everywhere, it was thought that prayer was particularly effective when offered in the temple courts. Interestingly, although Peter and John had embraced the new faith, they continued to observe some of the disciplines of the old, believing that these did not contradict the new.

Thus, the two men were approaching the temple to offer their evening prayers when they came upon a lame man sitting at the temple gate called Beautiful. It was customary for beggars to sit at the entrance to a temple or shrine because they knew from experience that people on their way to worship were more inclined to be generous and charitable, for love of man and love of God go hand in hand. The lame man asked for money but received something far better, as so often happens when we don’t understand what our real need is and mistakenly ask for something superficial. Peter said, “I have neither silver nor gold but I will give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk!” Peter then took the man’s hand and helped him to stand upright. Immediately, his feet and ankles were healed, and he went with Peter and John into the temple, walking and jumping and praising God.

Bystanders who had known the man to be severely crippled since birth marveled at what had happened. Peter and John were diligent in making clear that Christ was the author of the healing.

That brings us face to face with the question of miracles in apostolic times. They did happen and were necessary—as they are now—to call people to the Christian faith and its powerful message. Besides, faith was at its floodtide and there was a potent force of expectancy abroad that led men to receive these proofs of divine operation with a childlike trust, not pressing for scientific or technological documentation.

R&D What recognition as modern miracles do we give to the God-given benefits from medical research and technology?

Prayer: Father God, Your miracles happen today if we have the eyes to see them.

Day 24

Read: Acts 5:13-16

Stand Up and Be Counted

Solomon's Portico, a colonnaded cloister just outside the temple apparently was the site of this mission of Peter's. This passage tells us a great deal about the religious practices of the early Christians. Zealous in their desire to know God more deeply, they were constant in attendance at the temple and sincere in their recognition of Him as the source of all good. Although well aware of the suffering and persecution experienced by the apostles which might be their fate as well, they made no attempt to hide their adherence to the Christian faith. In fact, they were wont to assemble in conspicuous places, willing to "stand up and be counted," declaring to all the world whose they were and to whom they gave total allegiance. Small wonder that the early church was vibrant and effective!

In verse 15 we may wonder if it was superstition that led to the belief of a healing power inherent in Peter's very shadow as it fell on the sick lying on their pallets in the streets. But we must remember that this was a time of boundless expectancy in the church which resulted in a tremendous surge of faith and vitality. In the accounts of Jesus' healings, the faith of the sick person is frequently mentioned and examples are cited of persons being healed just by contact with clothing of the healing agent. Faith, wholehearted and unqualified, plays a large part in the occurrence of miracles, as is evidenced at some of the well-known shrines of healing such as Lourdes in France and St. Anne de Beaupre in Canada.

R&D When and in what kind of situation have you been willing to "stand up and be counted" for your inner conviction when that was not a popular position to take?

Prayer: Forgive me, Lord, that weakness of faith has caused me sometimes to fail to stand up for gospel truth.

Day 25

Read: Acts 9:31-35

Don't Just Sit There!

Lydda, the Greek form of the name Lod, was a town on the main route between Jerusalem and the seaport of Joppa. Although an unimportant village in Old Testament days, the town enjoyed a degree of importance during New Testament times as a prosperous center and a respected seat of learning. Following Jesus' injunction to take the gospel "to the ends of the earth," the fledgling church had begun to fulfill its mission by reaching out from Jerusalem into Judea and Samaria. Now the spotlight which had been largely on Paul shifts to Peter and his missionary tour which took him to Lydda.

Here he found Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. In a manner reminiscent of the way Jesus spoke to the paralytic (Mark 2:11), Peter commanded the helpless man to rise, take up his bed and walk. Frequently before a person receives healing, he is required to do something specific as a validation of his desire for wholeness. Disablement is such an insidious temptation! "I would gladly do it, but you know I am not able" can become a habit and an easy way out.

Jesus frequently tested the earnestness of a plea for healing by calling for the person to assume his part in the experience, to be more than merely a passive recipient of a miraculous healing. This is evident in the restoration of the withered hand: "Stretch out your hand" (Matthew

12:13); in the healing of congenital blindness: “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (John 9:7); in the cleansing of the leper: “Go, show yourself to the priest” (Luke 5:14).

In the healing at Lydda, Peter unequivocally declared that it was the power of Jesus’ healing love that effected the miracle, making clear that he himself was but the channel and not the source of that ability to heal. Unfortunately, men and women active in the healing ministry are often referred to as “healers” when actually they are channels or instruments of Christ’s healing love.

R&D When has some specific action or deed been required of you before healing occurred?

Prayer: You know us, Lord. Therefore, You know the particular healing we need.

Day 26

Read: Acts 14:8-18

Faith and Healing

This story has several features in common with that of Peter’s healing of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the temple (Acts 3:1-10). But there is also an important difference between the two. In the incident at Jerusalem, Peter made it clear to those present that it was the power of Jesus’ name that wrought the miracle. Here in Lystra, however, Paul was not quite so explicit, which is probably the cause of the ensuing confusion. Local legend held that in the distant past Zeus (king of the gods) and Hermes (god of speech) visited the earth incognito. No one offered them hospitality save a pious old peasant couple, Philemon and his wife Baucis. Consequently, in retaliation, the gods wiped out the entire population except Philemon and Baucis, who were rewarded by being made guardians of a splendid temple.

Among those listening to Paul preach at Lystra was a man crippled from birth. Immediately recognizing that the man had faith to be cured, Paul cried out loudly, “Get to your feet! Stand up!” The man jumped up and started to walk without help. So amazed were the onlookers that they interpreted this as a sign that Paul and Barnabas were indeed Hermes and Zeus returned to earth disguised as men. Determined to avoid the earlier mistake of ignoring the gods and thus bringing down wrath upon themselves, the people made haste to accord highest honors to the two. Revering Paul and Barnabas as gods, the people made ready to offer sacrifice to them and were prevented only by vehement intervention by the two.

R&D How did Paul recognize that the crippled man had faith to be healed?

Prayer: Unfortunately, Lord, it still happens that people deny Your healing power by attributing it to something else.

Day 27

Read: Acts 16:16-40

Unlikely Opportunity to Witness

At Philippi Paul and Silas encountered a young slave girl with the gift of divination. She had fallen into the hands of unscrupulous businessmen who exploited her supernatural gift and profited by it. When Paul, encumbered and embarrassed by her unsolicited statements and assertions, drove the unclean spirit out of her, her owners vented their fury against the apostles for

taking away their source of income and retaliated by having the two thrown into prison. What followed was a most unlikely opportunity for Christian witness.

At midnight, as Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise, a sudden earthquake shook the very foundations of the prison. Doors opened and the prisoners' bonds were loosed. Since it was the custom for a jailer to make reparation for the escape of a criminal by himself being subjected to the punishment intended for the escape, the jailer was about to kill himself but was spared by the missionaries' witness of the "good news." Immediately upon hearing the message of salvation through Christ, the jailer and all his household were brought into the faith.

R&D Under what unlikely circumstances have you had an opportunity to witness?

Prayer: Give me the strength, Lord, to look to You in times of crisis.

Day 28

Read: Acts 19:1-12

Incomplete Christians

Ephesus, capital city of the Roman Province of Asia, a marketplace of some importance and a center of pagan superstition, was fast becoming a significant focal point for the growing mission to the Gentiles. Paul found some faithful and conscientious disciples there, but they were quite ineffectual due to lack of the power of the Holy Spirit. Seeing this to be the case, Paul in his teaching stressed the difference between the baptism of John, the baptism of repentance which they had received, and baptism in the name of Christ, the "good news" which brings with it empowering by the Holy Spirit. John himself contrasted his baptism with that of Jesus. John's was a true repentance and intention to change one's life, while baptism in Jesus' name went further in bestowing the gift of the Spirit's empowerment to live a new life. The truth manifested here is that without the Holy Spirit complete Christianity is not possible. We may confess to true repentance and resolve to abandon the error of our ways, but we cannot make that change without the help of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we remain incomplete Christians.

When bitter opposition to Paul's teaching in the synagogue on matters relating to the kingdom of God made it necessary for him to find another gathering place, he fortunately was offered the use of Tyrannus' hall during certain hours of the day. Despite vigorous opposition from Jews and others, the Christian message spread rapidly and remarkable signs and wonders took place. Even the sweatbands and aprons, common garb of workmen that Paul also wore, were credited with extraordinary healing powers. However, this account does not say that Paul performed these prodigious deeds but rather that God did them through Paul's hands. Hands offered freely to God can be, and are, used as instruments of His miracles.

God alone is the healer but ours are the hands, the feet, the channels through which He performs His wonders.

R&D When and under what circumstances have you had an intense desire to subject yourself totally and unequivocally to the guidance and leading of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Take these hands, O God, and use them for Your purposes only.

Day 29

Read: Acts 20:7-12

House Church

In the early church the home was customarily the center of Christian fellowship as disciples gathered there to pray, to praise and to break bread together. In this section of the book of Acts we read a heartwarming description of the early Christian worship service. All contributed of their food and provisions to the Love Feast, a meal eaten in Christian fellowship and familial warmth characteristic of life in the young church. During the meal or at the end of it, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was observed. This usually took place at night since it was only after the day's work was finished that the slaves were free to come and participate in the Christian fellowship.

Probably this explains what happened to Eutychus. Tired, no doubt, after a full day's work, he sat on a window ledge in the hot, stuffy room, hoping for a refreshing breeze to help ward off increasing drowsiness. But as Paul's teaching and preaching continued well into the night, sleep finally overcame the young man and he fell out the window into the courtyard three stories below. The crowd hurried down the outside stairway to his aid. When they found him lying on the ground unconscious, fear that he was dead mounted and emotions ran out of control. Paul moved quickly to his side and bending over him ascertained that he was alive, merely stunned. The point here is not that the situation was not grave but rather that the power of God is greater than anything that can happen to us. It can restore us to life!

R&D Is it possible that, in gaining dignity and formality in our church services, we may have lost the homely warmth and caring so manifest in the early church? How can this be restored?

Prayer: Help me to stay wide awake so that I hear and obey the teachings that come through others speaking Your words, Lord.

Day 30

Read: Acts 28:1-10

Channels of Healing

After harrowing weeks spent on the storm-tossed ship, Paul and the rest of the company were cast ashore at Malta. The hospitable natives welcomed them, and Paul, ever the practical man as well as the visionary, joined them at once gathering wood to keep the bonfire going. When a snake from the brushwood attached itself to Paul's hand, he calmly shook it off. To the amazement of bystanders who expected him to die at once, he suffered no ill effects. It is difficult to judge whether this was a miraculous incident or not. It is a fact that there are no poisonous snakes on Malta today. However, in Paul's time there was a snake very similar to a viper in appearance, although harmless. But whatever the nature of the creature, Paul remained calm and unperturbed throughout what seemed to the Maltese to be a miraculous occurrence, which won their admiration.

Publius, chief official of the island, offered the hospitality of his home to Paul and his coterie. At that time, as it happened, Publius' father was ill with an attack of fever and dysentery. Compassionately, Paul exercised his gift of healing by praying and laying hands on the sick man. When healing followed, others who had ailments came to Paul and were healed also.

An interesting point here is that Paul, channel of healing to so many, was never relieved of his own "thorn in the flesh." Similarly, Emily Gardiner Neal, outstanding leader in the healing ministry, bore for many years severe suffering from a back injury sustained in a plane crash. She who was a channel of healing for countless others did not herself receive healing.

R&D *What do you see as a possible explanation of why some are healed and others are not?*

Prayer: *The Christian healing ministry is, in many ways, a mystery, Lord. But, thank You for it.*

Day 31

Read: Psalm 32:1-5

Penitence I

In our day it has become clear that there is often a direct connection between spiritual illness (not being in a right relationship with God) and its manifestations in physical illness. “When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away” (v.3). Therefore, any study of healing must include consideration of penitence, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

R.E.O. Smith calls Psalm 32 “the Gospel in the Old Testament,” an “almost perfect expression of post-penitential gladness.” We tend to carry the burden of our sinfulness around with us as an intolerable weight which we are unwilling to exchange for God’s forgiveness. How we dread admitting (confessing) our sins! Yet, once it has been done, we soar like an eagle—both free of the burden and renewed in the strength of the Lord—“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (v.1).

For the psalmist in this passage, illness had convicted him of sin. His body was shriveling, his energies sapped. Initially unwilling to confess, he then began the simple steps toward healing: acknowledging the sin within himself, resisting the temptation to continue hiding it, confession to God and receiving divine forgiveness. He had done the right thing.

The concept of penitence is heavy upon us because it means we must admit that we were wrong; but it is not nearly as heavy as the burden of sin it represents. And there is healing in confession and forgiveness.

R&D *What burden of sin do you need to confess?*

Prayer: *Lord, don’t let my pride or rationalizing stand in the way of my admitting my sins and seeking Your forgiveness.*

Day 32

Read: Matthew 3:1-12; 4:17

Penitence II

Both John the Baptist and Jesus begin their ministries with the call to repent. It is therefore essential for Christians to understand as fully as possible what is meant by repentance.

To the ancient Jew repentance was central to a relationship with God. According to G.F. Moore, “Repentance is the sole, but inexorable, condition of God’s forgiveness and the restoration of His favor, and the divine forgiveness and favor are never refused to genuine repentance. That God fully and freely remits the sins of the penitent is a cardinal doctrine.”

The Jewish word commonly used for repentance means to turn. Repentance, then, is a turning away from evil and a turning toward God. G.F. Moore again: “Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.” Repeatedly, the Bible speaks of turning away from sin and turning toward God (see, for example, Ezekiel 33:11, 18; Hosea 14:1-2).

As we near the end of the Lenten season, it is especially important that we respond to the demands of John and of Jesus that we repent, searching deeply and honestly within ourselves with a penitent heart. Only then can we experience a turning from death to life, from misery to joy, from sickness to health.

R&D Reflect on the steps necessary to turn.

Prayer: Help me always to make the turn, Lord.

Day 33

Read: Luke 18:9-14

Penitence III

The parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector gives us a graphic picture of what penitence is and is not. Penitence is not justifying ourselves, as the Pharisee did. We enter into penitence with no reservations, no excuses.

Penitence is not earning forgiveness. “The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses...the righteous shall not be able to live by his righteousness when he sins” (Ezekiel 33:12). There was no merit in the prayer of the Pharisee.

Penitence is humiliating. (Note the body language of the tax collector.) Repentance involves realizing how far short we fall of God’s expectations of us, and admitting that we have, once again, sinned.

Penitence is sincere. It acknowledges true sorrow for what we have done (“God be merciful to me, a sinner”) and an intention not to do it again.

Jesus is making the point that, if we seriously examine ourselves against the holiness of God, we will fall to our knees to plead for mercy. But the gift of mercy is readily bestowed upon the truly penitent. The amount of healing received is in equal measure to the amount of penitence rendered.

R&D What method of self-examination works for you?

Prayer: Lord, when I consider myself in relation to what You expect of me, I know my need for repentance.

Day 34

Read: Luke 15:11-32

Forgiveness I

What is normally referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son is perhaps the best example of what God’s forgiveness is all about that we can find in the Bible. The nature of the father’s forgiveness is also to be an example for us of how we are to forgive. The father is eager to forgive (he seemed to be looking for the son’s return (v.20) and rewards the penitent.

In our brief Lenten study of the healing we receive from forgiveness, we want to focus on what is expected of us in forgiving others. The elder brother in the story gives us an example of the bitter fruit that results from unforgiveness. If we want to be physically, spiritually, and emotionally healthy, it is a good idea to realize that unforgiveness on our part works against healing and wholeness.

Unforgiveness can be manifested in several ways. We can stuff the resentment deep down within ourselves, keeping up a good front to others. But the day comes when that resentment which has been festering inside of us erupts into a temper tantrum, physical illness, or general irritability. On the other hand, another effect of unforgiveness can be exploding in a rage concerning the injustice done to us, seeking revenge, and trying to line people up on our side. Before long, the situation gets totally out of hand and innocent parties—particularly our families—are injured.

A third possibility is the one the elder brother seems to have demonstrated. We sulk about the hurt to us, feeling sorry for ourselves and creating misery not only for ourselves but those around us.

The choice is ours. Is non-forgiveness really worth it; or is it better to do things Christ's way and forgive?

R&D When have you faced a situation like the one in the parable?

Prayer: Lord, too often I look at myself and see the older brother. Forgive me.

Day 35

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

Forgiveness II

Having given us a positive example of how the Father/God forgives, Jesus now illustrates the negative consequences of unforgiveness. The point in this and other Scripture passages on forgiveness is clear: there is nothing more incompatible with what is expected of us as Christians than unforgiveness.

There are three primary points to our passage for today. The first has to do with Peter's suggestion that forgiving another person seven times should perhaps be enough. The rabbinic teaching of Jesus' day was that three times was as much as a person had to forgive another. Peter was being especially generous in suggesting seven times. By using the term "seventy times seven" Jesus was saying that there is no limit to the number of times we must forgive the other person.

Secondly, we are shown that we must forgive in order to be forgiven. This is a principle that runs throughout the New Testament (Matthew 5:7, 6:14, 15; James 2:13).

Thirdly, we are shown why this is true. In the parable, the master (God) forgave the servant an incredible indebtedness. The servant, by comparison, is unwilling to forgive his debtor's small amount. Nothing that we have to forgive compares even remotely with what God has forgiven us.

R&D How does the parable of the Unforgiving Servant make you feel? Why?

Prayer: Lord, help me to be more forgiving that I may be more forgiven.

Day 36

Read: Matthew 5:38-42

Forgiveness III

In our last two studies of forgiveness, we have looked at why we should forgive. Specifically, we have considered the bitter fruit borne by unforgiveness and why and how much God expects us to forgive. Today and tomorrow we will consider the steps we can take in forgiving others.

First, though, in looking at our passage for today, Jesus tells us that retaliation has no part in the life of a Christian. We are not to seek revenge for an insult; we are not to stand on our rights, but to be forgiving; and we are not to think in terms of our privileges but our responsibilities. We are not only to be forgiving as a way of maintaining our own health but, by the spirit of forgiveness, to bring healing to others.

Doris Donnelly, a principal writer on forgiveness, suggests seven steps in the process of forgiving another. We'll look at four today:

1. Acknowledge the hurt; affirm the pain. This is not as easy as it sounds. It means admitting our own humanity, that we are not immune to the thoughtless or selfish acts of another.
2. Decide to forgive. Make an act of the will for the spirit to forgive.
3. Recognize that forgiveness is a process and will take time. Just as physical injuries take time to heal, so do hurt relationships.
4. Be realistic. Forgiveness isn't always as easy as it may look. Real forgiveness involves a little death that is not pleasant to endure.

R&D *When have you "turned the other cheek"?*

Prayer: *I pray, Lord, not to be too casual about my need to forgive.*

Day 37

Read: Matthew 6:7-15

Forgiveness IV

Today's passage is included in our brief study of the role of forgiveness in the healing process for one reason. The giving of what we call "The Lord's Prayer" is one of the most significant events in the Bible. It is worthy of special note that Jesus, after reciting the prayer (which includes the specific charge that we ask for forgiveness in the measure by which we forgive), comes back to the subject of forgiveness in verses 14-15. The message could not be clearer: as Christ's people in the world today, we are expected to forgive.

Yesterday we considered the first four steps in the process of forgiving, today the final three:

5. We convince ourselves that forgiving is worth it. We remember that Jesus taught forgiveness, and we consider the horrible alternative of continuing to carry the bitterness. We recall the stories of others who have been blessed by the act of forgiving and we reflect on the victories we have had in forgiving others.
6. We develop a plan of forgiveness and carry it out. Pray for guidance in how to do that. We may not need to tell the person that we are forgiving him or her; to do so might complicate matters if the person doesn't realize we have been hurt. We should, however take some positive action to evidence our forgiveness such as doing something nice for the person who offended us.
7. Pray for the person for a specific period of time. That will help the healing process as well as enabling us better to understand the one who offended us.

R&D *Do you have an opportunity to put these steps into practice?*

Prayer: *Help me, Lord, to be so intentional in forgiving a person that I keep from doing the sort of things that caused me to have to forgive in the first place.*

Day 38

Read: Matthew 5:23-26

Reconciliation I

As our Lenten study of healing draws to an end, we look at the subject of reconciliation. We are people meant to live in relationship with God and with one another. When our relationships are wrong, our physical, spiritual, and emotional wholeness can be severely damaged.

There are two primary points to our study for today. One has to do with the nature of sacrifices as understood by Jesus' followers. The other is a practical application of a principle the violation of which is being tragically manifested in many parts of the world today.

The "gift" referred to by Jesus in the passage would have been a sacrifice offered at the altar as an atonement for sin. To be effective, the sacrifice had to include confession of sin and true repentance; and repentance, in turn, necessitated the attempt to rectify any consequence the sin might have had.

The purpose of the sacrifice was to get back into relationship with God. But, as Jesus is pointing out in this teaching, how can the relationship with God be restored if we are out of relationship with a fellow human being? Again, health and wholeness come from being in relationship with God and man.

Today in the Middle East, in parts of Africa, and elsewhere in the world, bitter hatred exists between nations, tribes and cultural, ethnic and religious groups. This is because differences between them had not been worked out when grievances first appeared; now the hatred is deep-seated and attempts at reconciliation horribly frustrating. Jesus counsels us to nip the problem in the bud, when reconciliation is relatively easy.

R&D When have you prevented a serious and continuing conflict by taking timely action toward reconciliation?

Prayer: Help us to be sensitive to what we say, Lord. We want to be reconcilers and not dividers.

Day 39

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Good Friday

Today, perhaps more than any other day of the year, we should be conscious of what God has done for us. Throughout the Bible we see a God who wants to be in relationship with His people. As the *Book of Common Prayer* says, "You made us the rulers of creation. But we turned against you and betrayed your trust; and we turned against one another. Again and again you called us to return. Through prophets and sages you revealed your righteous Law. And in the fullness of time you sent your only Son."

Reconciliation. God so loved the world that He sent His only Son that if we will only believe in Him we will have eternity with God (John 3:16). The ultimate attempt at reconciliation. The ultimate sacrifice.

As we contemplate Jesus on the cross, our passage for today speaks to our hearts. The sacrifice for reconciliation has been made, the work of reconciliation has begun. The dictionary says that reconciliation is the act of making friends. God wants to be in friendship with people. As Christians, we have been given this ministry of reconciliation, of making friends for God (v.18). It is not an optional ministry; it is something we are all called to do.

Christ will not have died on the cross in vain if we, his people, will be his ambassadors in the world, reconciling a desperately needy world to a God who loves us all.

R&D *How can you be a better ambassador for Christ?*

Prayer: *Reconciled to You, reconciled to one another...that is what You want for us, Dear Lord.*

Day 40

Read: Revelation 21:1-4

Holy Saturday

As we reach the end of Lent and the end of our study of Healing and Wholeness, the Revelation of John gives us the ultimate picture of healing and of reconciliation. We see the culmination of things hoped for throughout the Bible.

There is the New Jerusalem (v.2; see also Isaiah 54:12, 60:11-22; Haggai 2:7-9 and chapters 40 and 48 of Ezekiel). The dream of the New Jerusalem was deeply imbedded in the minds of the prophets. John would have had a composite picture of those dreams as he foresaw the New Jerusalem.

There are the words of comfort: God will dwell with His people, He will wipe away all tears from their eyes and death shall be no more (vv.3-4). The ultimate healing, the ultimate reconciliation.

John's vision is what Christians look toward, the joy of eternal life with God. But let us not forget the foretaste, the abundant life (John 10:10) that God wants for His people here on earth. It is a life in which healing and wholeness are worthy to be sought.

R&D *What healing will you now seek, and how?*

Prayer: *We know that we receive the ultimate healing in You, Lord God, because we know how Your Book ends.*

by Beverly Allison, John F. Wyatt, Mildred Green, and Harry C. Griffith

Copyright © 2021 by the Bible Reading Fellowship
PO Box 380, Winter Park, FL 32790

This study is reprinted from *The Journey*, a publication of the Bible Reading Fellowship. For more information about our publications, please visit our website www.biblereading.org.