

What Is the Relation between Healing and the Kingdom of God?

The birth and ministry of Jesus inaugurates the kingdom of God on earth. But the kingdom will not reach its full fruition until Christ returns. Therefore, we currently live in the “already-not yet” kingdom of God. This reality sheds light on the healing ministry of Jesus as depicted in the Bible, as well as our healing ministries today.

When people encountered Jesus in His earthly ministry, they were encountering the kingdom of God. The healings that took place demonstrated that the kingdom of God had arrived on earth, at least in part (*Healing and the Kingdom in the Ministry of Jesus*, PowerPoint). A kingdom worldview helps us to see the relationship between sickness and God’s redemption and restoration plan. Jesus regarded sickness and death as signs of our bondage to the kingdom of darkness. Satan’s objective is to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10). By Jesus’ healing power, even before He defeated death on the cross, Jesus was freeing people from Satan’s bondage.

With each healing, Jesus was taking back ground from the enemy for the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20). Sometimes physical and emotional healing took place in conjunction with deliverance (Luke 8:26-39). Regardless of the type of healing, it was evidence of the good news that the kingdom of God had arrived.

Today, by the power of the Holy Spirit through our healing and deliverance ministries (physical, emotional, spiritual, and generational healing), Jesus continues to take ground away from the enemy and advance the kingdom of God. Blue reminds us that today, we tend to view sickness through a modern, scientific lens (Blue, 86). In healing ministry and in the church as a whole, it is important that we recover a biblical perspective of sickness and healing. For Jesus, whether He is healing a man of paralysis or forgiving his sins; whether He is healing a fever or driving out a demon; whether He is raising a man from the dead or offering that same man the

gift of eternal life; everything Jesus does to bring healing is a part of the salvation God offers through Christ. In the church today, we need to maintain that holistic perspective of healing.

Advancing God's kingdom goes beyond healing and deliverance. In Jesus' healings, we see God's desire for redemption and restoration. In Luke 8:43-48, we see Jesus not only healing a woman of a physical condition, but also restoring her to community. In Matthew 8:4, Jesus likewise heals a leper and sends him to be confirmed and restored by the priest.

In Isaiah 35 and 53, we find a prophetic description of the transformation that occurs under the Messiah's reign. We also hear prophetically the way healing connects with Jesus' crucifixion. Early readers of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' healings would have recognized words from Isaiah 35:5-6: how the blind, deaf, and lame are healed. Thus, Jesus' healing ministry confirms the arrival of the Messiah, which heralds the coming of God's kingdom.

Both the "already" and "not yet" aspects of God's kingdom need to shape our perspective for healing ministry. In his earthly ministry, Jesus stopped in the midst of His journeys to heal people immediately. We see this with Blind Bartimaeus, Jairus's daughter, the Centurion's servant, and others. The healings took place immediately, indicating God's kingdom had already arrived. In our healing ministries today, we can respond with the same sense of "already," by boldly seeking and expecting immediate healing.

However, we must also temper this sense of immediacy with an understanding that the kingdom is not yet fully here. Some people will not be healed right away. It might take time and persistence in seeking healing. Others might not be healed at all and might live out their lives with whatever ailment they are asking God to heal. Still other people might receive their healing only in death. We need to acknowledge and honor the mystery of God, which includes the way God heals. This should give us hope and peace in situations where we do not see healing. We are

reminded that no matter what takes place, Jesus is right here with us. He is responding to the person seeking healing, possibly in ways we cannot see, or in ways that lead to a deeper relationship with Him, which is the primary purpose of His kingdom.

In healing ministry, it is easy to get caught up in the healing itself. Because we carry Christ's compassion in our hearts, we hurt when people suffer. We want to see people made well. If we don't keep in mind the bigger picture of God's kingdom, we can become too focused on healing as an end. God's biblical narrative reminds us that healing is not the ultimate destination. The kingdom of God is what we are seeking above all (*Healing and the Kingdom in the Ministry of Jesus*, PowerPoint).

If we keep in mind that God's kingdom is the destination, and healing is only part of the journey, we will have a healthier perspective in healing ministry and as followers of Christ. We will be less inclined to demand healing "our way." Instead, we can see what God is doing in each person's life through a particular circumstance, and praise Him for it. The big picture also helps us persist in seeking physical healing, even when we don't see immediate results. And the kingdom perspective reminds us that inner healing is a lifetime process of transformation. Along the way, we should see more fruit of the Spirit within us in new ways, and thus God's kingdom and restoration taking place increasingly in our hearts.

What Is the Relationship between the Cross of Christ and Healing?

Isaiah 53:5 paints a picture of how healing is part of the salvation Jesus brings us through His death and resurrection. In His broken body, Jesus bears all the consequences of our sin, including all personal and generational manifestations of our physical and emotional enslavement to Satan. The cross therefore provides for every aspect of our healing.

Jesus died and was resurrected once, for all, and so positionally we are saved if we accept by faith His gift of salvation. But as Philippians 2:12 reminds us, we continue to appropriate His salvation to every part of our hearts and bodies, as we walk out our sanctification and transformation. In areas where the enemy continues to wreak havoc in our lives, Jesus continues to take our wounds into His broken body, if we will let Him.

The cross of Christ also teaches us about suffering. As believers, we often find ourselves living in the fellowship of the suffering of Christ (Philippians 3:10). The word “suffering” here refers to experiential suffering, rather than to physical affliction. This is an important distinction for the church to understand. It is common for people to simply accept physical agony and suffer through it, believing they are suffering with Christ. As a church, we need to learn and teach that the cross offers healing for these physical afflictions. We know from John 11:33 that Jesus was distressed and angry in His Spirit over the death of Lazarus (*Healing Lessons from the Raising of Lazarus*, PowerPoint). On the cross, death was an enemy to be defeated.

When we look at the depths of suffering in the world, we also see in the cross how Jesus meets us in our suffering. When questions of theodicy are raised, the cross is a significant part of our response. Through the cross, Jesus not only relates to our suffering; He also experiences our particular suffering along with us. He carried each one of us on the cross, and He still does today.

One of my biggest personal healing experiences was being set free from the trauma of 9/11. I worked across the street from the World Trade Center and my community was destroyed. For ten years, the trauma was unbearable and often shut me down. I had experienced inner healing in other areas of my life, but I thought this was too big even for God. Finally, I went to a fellow prayer minister and said, “It’s time.” During a 45-minute session, I found absolute healing from this trauma. The reason? Jesus identified Himself with my particular suffering. He showed

me that He not only grieved for the situation, but that He also knew and shared my particular grief. As I saw Him carrying my very specific grief, I was healed and was able to share my testimony in church that Sunday, on the tenth anniversary of 9/11.

Even in situations not yet healed, we have the comfort of knowing we can come to Jesus and feel His suffering for us – itself a form of healing the church needs to model for the world.

Our process of forgiveness carries out in a small way what God accomplished for us on the cross. In forgiveness, we choose to absorb the pain. We allow our wrath, against the hurt that was done to us, to stop with us. This creates a victory over the powers of darkness. We choose to forgive and bless, releasing God's love to the person who hurt us. This is a direct reflection of how God absorbed His own wrath on the cross so we could be forgiven and filled with His love.

Jesus tells His disciples that He lays down His life for His sheep, and further equates this to laying down His life for His friends (John 10:15, 17-18; John 15:13). He says He does this of His own accord – no one takes His life from Him, but He chooses to sacrifice for those He loves. Through the process of sanctification and inner healing, we have the privilege to follow the example of Christ. For most of us, this does not mean literally losing our lives. But it does invite a sacrifice of our new lives in Christ, for the sake of living out His kingdom in the world.

As we allow God to work healing and freedom in our hearts and lives, we are called to lay down our newfound freedom and newly healed lives for the sake of the healing of other people. For some, this might mean a call to healing or inner healing ministry, as happened with me. For others, it might be an invitation to seek generational healing for the sake of their families. Others might carry their healing and freedom in Christ into their workplace – they are willing to carry a spirit of peace, reconciliation, and wisdom to affect their workplace atmosphere for the kingdom of God. For others, it might mean walking in forgiveness.

Seamands explains that when Jesus laid down His life for us, He proved that He was not bound by the enemy. He “proved their claim to have power over life and death was false” and the enemy “finally had to concede defeat” (Seamands, 101). As we surrender our lives to Christ, and through the process of sanctification give Him access to deeper areas of our hearts, we too find the enemy having to give up his rights to those areas.

In healing ministry, it is helpful to keep this description in mind. Sometimes the enemy concedes his rights slowly, or tries to reassert his claim against us. When that happens, we point to the cross and say, “It’s already done.” If there is more to surrender in that area, God will show us. But where we have already surrendered, we need to stand firm in recognizing it is done. Often it takes time for the effects of our healing to be worked out fully in our lives, and sometimes we don’t see healing take place in the ways we expect. But we stand assured that where we have surrendered and received God’s healing, the enemy is defeated at the cross.

The cross should be the focal point of preaching and teaching in our churches. Too often, we overlook this message. How can we walk in healing as a church, if we do not understand God’s work of forgiveness, healing, redemption, and restoration through the cross of Christ?

What Can We Learn about Healing from John Wesley?

John Wesley believed God’s love heals, and he saw healing as part of salvation. For Wesley, God’s redemption plan went beyond the “legal” process of atonement for our sins. Wesley taught that God’s plan for us includes healing through sanctification and restoration. In the Wesleyan view, God not only imputes righteousness through Christ, but further imparts righteousness through sanctification. Not only are we reconciled to God through the cross, but we also begin a new life in which the image of God is restored in us.

Often, Wesley equated the process of sanctification with God working as our physician (*John Wesley on Healing, PowerPoint*). Wesley talked about sin in terms of sickness that needed to be healed. Restoration for Wesley could be understood as God's mission to bring recovery into our lives from the sickness of sin – with the ultimate goal to restore God's image in us.

The teachings of Wesley reflect his belief that God desires health for His people: spiritual, emotional, and physical. Wesley was ahead of his time in understanding the dynamics of emotional healing. Many of our healing ministries today, especially inner healing, reflect a biblical view that would be compatible with Wesley's teaching.

In Wesleyan teaching, we see the importance of health in the body of Christ, for the sake of spreading the gospel. If the church is weakened by spiritual, emotional, and physical sickness, how can it shine Christ's light in the world? We struggle with this weakness today. The church has not embraced fully the ministry of healing that Jesus practiced and that Wesley embraced.

Wesley did not believe that the healing work of God ended with the apostles (*John Wesley on Healing, PowerPoint*). This too is an important message for the church today. Many people (even in churches descended from Wesley's Methodism) do not believe that God still heals or that healing is a priority for church teaching and outreach. If Wesleyan-rooted churches will get back to the basics of the gospel and the Wesleyan biblical worldview, we will rediscover a life of sanctification that brings God's active healing love to the world.

Part of what the church needs to rediscover is how Wesley connected sanctification and healing with growing in holiness. As they seek their healing, people draw closer in relationship with God. Through healing and sanctification, the image of God takes deeper root in each person's heart. The fruit of the Spirit becomes increasingly evident. As God's love manifests

deeply in people – spirit, soul, and body – they can share this depth of God’s love with others. They are drawn to community, to live in healing and wholeness, centered in God’s love.

For Wesley, sanctification results in social holiness, a loving relationship with God and others. Wesley believed that each person should carry Christ’s compassion in mission to the world, meeting people in their greatest needs. These needs include physical and emotional suffering, as well as material needs. Wesley’s desire to help people learn how to read, for example, was a way to be used by God to remedy illiteracy and impart healing in people’s lives.

In terms of physical healing, Wesley published the *Primitive Physick* in an effort to help people who could not afford medical care, as most of the population could not. Wesley learned and imparted guidance about practical and natural ways to care for common illnesses. He demonstrated that God cares about people’s afflictions. He was also ahead of his time in understanding the psychosomatic causes of illness and how God’s love could intervene and bring healing (*John Wesley on Healing, PowerPoint*).

Wesley served in the Church of England at a time when Deism dictated much of church practice. A sense of the mystery of God and the sacraments had been lost. Inspired in part by Pietism and his own upbringing, Wesley reintroduced to the church these ideas of sacrament, mystery, and experiential relationship with God. This includes a focus on God’s supernatural healing. Deism, which was the expression of Enlightenment in the church, wanted everything scientifically ordered and explained. In that environment, Wesley wrote and shared about experiences of supernatural healing (*John Wesley on Healing, PowerPoint*).

Wesley focused on holistic spirituality. He also maintained a holistic healing perspective that included not only supernatural healing, but also natural and medicinal healing (*John Wesley on Healing, PowerPoint*). Wesley is known for his tendency to hold two seemingly polar

opposites in balance, emphasizing the truth of each one. He does this with supernatural and natural healing. This gives us a foundation today for a holistic approach to healing.

Even though the kingdom of God is not fully here, Wesley focused on the “now” aspects of sanctification and transformation, which includes healing of physical and emotional issues, healing of relationships and communities, and healing in the earth. For Wesley, God’s ultimate goal of restoration is already beginning to be visible, and the follower of Christ is responsible to live out these beginnings of restoration for the sake of others.

I grew up in the United Methodist Church; served on staff for many years; and I am connected with many inner healing ministries in my region, only a few of which are part of the United Methodist Church. I have watched many healing prayer and inner healing ministries struggle in the United Methodist Church setting. At the same time, I have been privileged to incorporate healing prayer and inner healing into church classes, events, and worship services.

Through my seminary studies, I have come to believe that one of the most effective ways to introduce healing ministries to the United Methodist Church is through the teachings and practices of John Wesley. As a lifelong Methodist, I was always surprised at how little reception many churches in my denomination have given to healing prayer and especially inner healing ministries. I knew John Wesley believed in heart change through the process of sanctification. That is inner healing ministry. I also knew he emphasized healing and prayer in the early Methodist renewal movement. I often asked why the church couldn’t make those connections.

Then I realized many United Methodist congregations do not know their roots in Wesleyan teachings and practices. From teaching on staff, I know those types of classes would initially draw more interest than inner healing classes. If churches refocus on their Wesleyan

roots, this might be a foundation to introduce healing prayer and inner healing. I believe this would open people's hearts to see how God heals and how Wesley understood our healing God.

What Is the Role of Faith in Healing?

The word "faith" is often used in connection with healing, and faith for healing is biblically significant. However, too often the word "faith" is misused. Misconceptions of faith not only can hinder God's healing, but also can wound people.

I remember serving at a healing retreat. A friend had just lost her son in a car accident. Even after he was declared dead, his family had prayed by his bedside, believing God would raise him. After four days of vigilant prayer and expectation, with no response from their son, they accepted his death. The leader of our retreat had invited our friend to share her heart, as many participants on the retreat were grieving different types of losses.

Our friend left the retreat feeling distraught. When we asked what happened, she shared that the retreat hostess told her if she just had more faith, her son would have lived. What a devastating thing to say. And what a setback for our friend. To this day, many years later, she has not recovered from her loss, and is in physical and emotional decline.

That devastating comment came from not understanding the role of faith in healing. Faith brings expectation of God's love to manifest in healing. Whether or not healing takes place as we hope and expect, our faith is strengthened by our trust in God. Our friend demonstrated her faith by bringing her son expectantly to Jesus for healing, just as the paralytic's friends brought him to Jesus (Luke 5:18-25; class notes). The fact that healing did not take place in the way she had hoped does not mean he was not healed; and it does not mean she didn't have enough faith.

Blue labels this misconception as a "faith formula" (42-43). It is the idea that we can manipulate God to heal by our sheer willpower and by our design. We decide what healing will

look like, and if it doesn't, we will conclude faith was lacking. This is similar to the "name it, claim it" mindset. Blue indicates this "faith formula" is an obstacle to healing (42).

Farah cautions of the dangers of misunderstanding faith (MacNutt, 232-233). On one hand, faith can be seen as the simple act of coming expectantly to God for healing. On the other hand, a misunderstanding of faith can oversimplify the complexities of healing.

It is dangerous to take Luke 8:48 out of context and say, "Your faith has made you well. Stop taking your medication." We cannot simply compare the biblical phrase with a person's medical condition and healing journey. We need to understand the meaning of that passage of scripture before we can attempt to interpret, let alone apply it. And we need to recognize that, first of all, we are not medical doctors privileged to give medical advice; and secondly, we cannot know the complexity of how God is healing that person. When healing of an ailment *does* take place, the person will know it, and the doctor will confirm it.

I nearly experienced the danger of presumption masquerading as faith (MacNutt, 228). Newly divorced from an abusive, childless marriage, I received a prophetic word from a pastor who did not know me. She asked if I intended to adopt children. When I said yes, she added, "I sense the Lord will let you adopt but will also give you a child by natural birth."

I was new to prophetic ministry and did not know the wisdom of bringing this word to people who knew me and who understood how God speaks. Often an image of birth does not mean literal childbirth, but perhaps the birth of a vision. The way she delivered that prophetic word was inappropriate. However, I desperately wanted children and took that word to heart.

A few years later, I developed a 6.5-pound ovarian tumor. Not knowing if the tumor was cancerous, my doctor wanted to perform a total abdominal hysterectomy. I would not let him do that because I remembered that prophetic word. He warned me of the dangers. This time, I

sought prayer and counsel from trusted people at my church. Finally, I realized that my greatest concern was not the prophetic word, but rather I wanted God to have the final say in the operating room. After talking with my doctor, I told him that if the biopsy during surgery showed signs of cancer, he could perform a total hysterectomy. He warned me that because of the size of the tumor, the biopsy might miss the presence of cancer. But I had peace with our plan because it left God in charge. My doctor, a godly man, finally agreed.

As it turned out, I did have cancer and I lost my ability to give birth to children. In my grief, God spoke to my heart and told me He had many children for me. For the next eight years, I worked in children's and teen ministries of inner healing. When I look back on that prophetic word, I realize she did not give the word as she heard it. She added her own interpretation. And it was a dangerous one. My presumptive faith nearly cost me my life. Praise God that He intervened with godly counsel and wisdom, and with a godly physician.

Genuine faith is not manipulative. It is the simple trust that God heals; the expectancy of seeking healing from God; the obedience to come to Him for healing; and the boldness to pray for healing because we know the kingdom is (in part) already here (*Theological Foundations for Healing*, PowerPoint). God works faith in us; sometimes He gives a gift of faith. None of this equates with a particular healing outcome. But faith grows us in relationship and trust with God.

As Blue reminds us, healing can take place in the absence of faith (45). This is part of the mystery of God and helps us remain humble, an important characteristic for healing (or any) ministry. As my inner healing mentor says, "We're not responsible if they're healed. We're not responsible if they're not." God is the one who heals.

Certain practices increase our faith. John Wesley reminds us that the means of grace keep our faith growing (class notes). The means of grace, such as prayer and fasting, Communion,

Bible study, and Christian fellowship are the places where God promises to meet us. When we enter those places, our faith grows through God's presence and interaction with us. Words of knowledge and testimonies can also increase our faith (class notes). I have faith that God heals cancer because He healed me.

Why Doesn't Healing Always Happen?

I have been blessed this week to sit for eight hours each day with a friend who just got home from the hospital. She is in her 80s and is precious. She has gone through many emotional struggles in her life but has always kept her faith in Christ. Apart from back trouble, her physical body has always been healthy. Now she is in a great deal of pain. She has had two back surgeries and is told she is not a candidate for a third surgery. Because of a history of addiction, from which she has been delivered, she and her family are careful about her use of pain medication. She is learning to push through the pain by turning to God for comfort and strength. I have been helping her through that process, simply by being present with her, praying with her, encouraging her, and talking with her about healing prayer.

Yesterday, she asked this very question: "Why doesn't healing always happen?" Because I know her and her family very well, I felt comfortable to talk theologically about this. Of course, I began with, "I don't know. It's always hard to understand." I said this because I wanted to share with her, not as a seminary student and healing minister, but as a human who has struggled too and has seen so many people suffer. It is always hard for our hearts to understand suffering, even though our minds might offer theological answers like, "Free will" and "God's ways are not our ways." But I also told her about this class assignment and that I would be responding to this very question. So I shared some of these responses with her.

First, we considered how the kingdom of God is here but not yet fully manifested. We still live under sin in the world. Even though God's mission is redemption, healing, and

restoration, this has not all taken place yet. Some healing takes place now; other healing has not yet occurred (Blue, 89-90). The mystery of God means we don't understand everything that takes place and why some prayers for healing don't seem to be answered. I encouraged her that no matter what we experience with our senses, we have to trust in what we know to be true: God heals; He is good and faithful; God desires His best for us; He loves us with an everlasting love. Healing might not look the way we expect (Pearson, 39), so it is important that we trust Him.

We talked about what I learned from MacNutt when he discusses persevering in prayer (151-152). Pearson likewise reminds us that healing may take place one step at a time (43). This is especially important for my friend: to realize healing may be a process; to stay focused on God during bouts of pain; to rely on Him rather than seeking false refuge in a drug. This is not meant to be a negative comment on how God works through medicine. With her history of addiction, drugs have been more than a means of healing. They have become her false refuge. Now she is learning to trust God as her refuge, even in the midst of pain.

MacNutt talks about continuing to seek healing, in new ways, when healing does not at first occur. He advises that we pay attention to how we might be growing closer to God through the healing process (151). We allow God to raise us up, rather than allowing pain to bring us down. My friend is learning this as she walks through her healing. MacNutt goes on to discuss how some problems might be generational or communal (171). My friend's daughter, also a close friend, leads an inner healing ministry. She has prayed just about every generational healing prayer imaginable, and for healing in our community as well. Now it might be her mother's turn to add her prayers for the sake of healing in the generations.

We might also miss God's healing work because it doesn't look the way we expect (Pearson, 39). When healing doesn't happen right away, God may be working holistically, one

layer at a time. Pearson reminds us it is important to seek God for what He is working on, so we can participate with Him (45). For my friend, God is helping her to break free of dread; to let go of old trauma; to focus her mind on God rather than the lies of the enemy; and to choose life, rather than cling to an old death wish and an underlying belief that her life does not matter.

Along with Pearson, we talked about how her negative thoughts not only undermine her faith for healing (50-51), but also lower her immunity and suppress her body's natural healing capacity. She recognized that she lives in fear that her recent bout of debilitating pain will reoccur. This causes her to feel weak, shaky, and restless; and to wrestle between lies and truth. She repented of her dread, released her trauma to God, and received His peace. She exchanged her trust in medication alone for trust in God, believing He can meet her needs (Pearson, 51).

We also talked about obstacles to healing, such as unforgiveness and bitterness, which my friend recognizes in one of her siblings, and how it is affecting her children. Other obstacles include pride, fear, striving, and unbelief. She shared that a history of occult practices blocks some of her family members from healing. I shared experiences of watching people healed from the effects of occult practices, and encouraged her to persevere in prayer for her family.

Today, my friend asked the question again, concerning a new situation: the sudden death of a healing minister in our community. She wondered why this woman, who she had known and loved for years, was not healed. I reminded her that actually she is healed now, and in the presence of the Lord. We also discussed lies my friend is struggling with about death, and we prayed so that she would find comfort from God in her grief.

We prayed for another friend who spent her days helping this minister to die peacefully and in God's love. Our friend didn't know this minister would die suddenly. But without realizing it, she offered the kind of ministry Pearson talks about: praying for healing while at the

same time discerning and helping a person prepare for death (46-48). Our friend helped bring peace and emotional healing to this minister and her family as her time of death approached.

We have invited that friend to come and sit with us tomorrow, so we can offer her comfort and love. As I reflect on this whole situation, I can see God’s healing love at work, for each one of us, together, in different ways. This is what healing in the body of Christ looks like.

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