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Jesus the Healer: Reflections on the Second “Square” of the Foursquare Gospel

Jeremy Wallace, D.Min.¹

Introduction

It has been said that the Foursquare Church was simply a “Message that became a Movement, and a Movement which became a Denomination.” For those unfamiliar with the Foursquare Church, Aimee Semple McPherson, her founder, preached in the early twentieth century, a message she called the “foursquare gospel.” That is, in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, four distinct entailments of the “Good News” stood out among the rest; namely, Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Healer, the Baptizer in the Holy Spirit, and the Soon Coming King. Each of these constitutes one of the four “squares” of the Foursquare Gospel.

It should come as no surprise, then, to see that the present issue of *Quadrum* will focus on the topic of Jesus the Healer. The clear stance of the Foursquare Church with respect to divine healing may be found within the *Declaration of Faith*, a foundational document of the Foursquare Church. It states the following: “We believe that divine healing is the power of the Lord Jesus Christ to heal the sick in the afflicted in answer to believing prayer; that He who is the same yesterday, and today and forever has never changed but is still an all-sufficient help in the time of trouble, able to meet the needs of, and quicken into newness of life, the body, as well as the soul and spirit, in answer to the faith of them who ever pray with submission to his divine and sovereign will.”²

Personal Reflections

The topic of healing is as relevant today as it has ever been. For many who take the Bible and its message seriously, one cannot help but see that healing not only holds a prominent place within its pages, but in terms of its presence in the Gospels, “the proportion of verses in each of the four Gospels dealing with healing ranges from a low of 5 percent in John to 20 percent in Mark.”³ One out of every five verses in the Gospel of Mark is dealing with healing?! That is substantial. Indeed, healing was a central feature to Jesus’ primary message of the Kingdom of God. Matthew encapsulated well the basic ministry of Jesus to the Galileans when he wrote, “Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness” (Matt. 9:35 NIV). Teaching, proclaiming and healing—in other words, most of Jesus’ efforts in his earthly ministry were made (1) making known the reality of the Kingdom, (2) explicating the nature and entailments of the Kingdom, and (3) demonstrating the power of the Kingdom for all to behold.

Many people do not know this but I have experienced physical healing in my body on more than one occasion. At the age of 10 I was bedridden in a hospital due to an unfortunate convergence of viral pneumonia, a bronchial

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² Aimee Semple McPherson, *Declaration of Faith* (Los Angeles, CA: International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, n.d.), 20.

³ J. Wilkinson, “Study in Healing in the Gospel according to John,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967) 442, as cited in Ronald A.N. Kydd, *Healing Throughout the Centuries: Models for Understanding* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 2.

infection, and an extreme asthmatic attack. With each passing day, I knew I was getting closer and closer to death. In short, I was miraculously healed and discharged from the hospital and ever since that day I have known the healing power of Jesus Christ. I have also had the privilege of seeing many whom I have prayed for over the years healed from various physical ailments, infirmities, and abnormalities. I leave such encounters with exceeding gratitude and a profound sense that these events are truly not about me in the least, but rather they are about the matchless power of Jesus and His abundant heart to liberate the oppressed. Having personally experienced God's healing power, the topic of healing has never been a matter of debate. Somewhat ironically, when I was healed at 10 years old I was attending a denomination that did not believe that healing was for today! They did not know what to do with me. And yet, I was standing proof that healing is indeed available today. On this, I recall the sentiments of Duffield and Van Cleave: "In some circles, there is a good deal of misunderstanding, and opposition, with regard to Divine Healing. This is due to a failure to accept and comprehend the full teaching of the Word of God on this subject."⁴ As a witness (or recipient) of the healing power divine healing, the question is never a matter of *whether* God heals, but a matter of *when* and *how* it may occur.

While the import of healing has been historically foundational to the Foursquare Church, it is no less important a topic to be given attention today. As we look at the world around us, we see the need for healing at every level. The need for divine healing is an ever-present reality, both on an individual and societal scale. The need for healing abounds, whether it be physical healing, emotional healing, spiritual healing, relational healing, and/or societal healing. As ministers the Foursquare Gospel, and as members and attenders of Foursquare churches, it is my prayer that we will be a people who not only *proclaims* the healing power of Jesus, but who actively *contends for* healing (in its various forms), *makes room for* God to heal (in our public and private gatherings), and *walks in* the healing which Jesus provides.

The Present Issue

At the 2019 Foursquare Connection in Nashville, Tennessee, the Foursquare Scholars Fellowship hosted a well-attended breakout session on "Jesus The Healer," engaging in a panel discussion on the topic. Participants included Andy Opie, Clayton Robinson, and Becca Marie Hald, and was moderated by Doug Bursch. It was a notable, invigorating gathering which no doubt served as a sign that scholarship has a place in the Foursquare movement and a collaborative relationship of fruitful reciprocity can exist between the church and the Academy, ministers and academicians. We trust this is a glimpse of even greater things to come.

In the present issue, one will find three splendid articles addressing healing by contributors within our Foursquare family. Also present is a featured reprint of an old message on divine healing by Sister Aimee. We are grateful to have received permission to reprint this article. We do hope you find it encouraging, if not challenging. Clayton D. Robinson offers a clear and concise exposition regarding the healing ministry of Jesus, giving special attention to the various methods of healing Jesus employed. Next, Becca Marie Hald examines the current mental health epidemic and presents a compelling test case examination of three biblical figures: Elijah, David, and Paul. In

⁴ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1987), 363.

our final article, Stephen Athanasius Lennstrom applies an ethno-racial analysis of particular New Testament texts, making a strong contention that the Church of Jesus the Healer must be vigilant in its efforts to address and confront the nefarious reality of racism.

Divine Healing: How to Get It and How to Keep It

Aimee Semple-McPherson

"Thy faith hath made thee whole."

"According to thy faith be it done unto thee."

"Woman, great is thy faith. Be it done unto thee even as thou wilt."

Divine Healing: How to Get It

These were the words of the Master when He trod the shores of Galilee. 'Twas faith that made the believer whole in Bible days, and 'tis faith that can reach up and touch the hem of the Master's seamless dress that can make us whole today. For "verily if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed," said Jesus, "ye shall say unto this mountain, 'Be thou removed to yonder place and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you.'"

In order to get this living, active mountain-moving faith in Jesus Christ, one must get on believing ground. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God. To rightfully understand and feed upon the Word, the heart must be given to the Lord Jesus; we must be washed in the precious blood, be born again, and be no longer children of darkness but children of light.

"Well, if the Lord heals me, I'll believe and be converted," we hear someone say.

But, dear one, this is not the attitude in which to come to the Great Physician, Jesus. He did not heal the sick under those conditions when He was on Earth. Healing was not received first and faith afterward but faith first and then healing, for He said, "Thy faith hath made thee whole."

But to a sinful nation that seeks a sign, no sign shall be given; neither can one bargain with the Lord and exchange service for healing. Many forget their vows and promises to God after the answer has come.

Be Born Again. Positively, the first thing to do is to be genuinely born again, not for the sake of being healed but because of real heart conviction for sin and the wooing, all-conquering love of Jesus Christ.

Many have been not a little surprised and filled with questioning, when, in our meetings we have made a complete surrender to Jesus, a change of heart, and a bright salvation experience among the conditions under which we would pray for the healing of the sick and afflicted. But, you see, it is Jesus and not ourselves unto whom the afflicted must look for healing. It is unto Him that they must pray.

Think for a moment: How could a sinner pray to the Lord for healing? If he were really honest, he would have to pray something like this: "Oh, Lord Jesus, I am a sinner. I know you have long been knocking at my heart's door and that I have never been willing to let You in. Even now I am unwilling to deny myself or to take up my cross and follow you. But while I am not ready to live for you nor to repent of the coldness and sin that grieves your heart, and though I am rejecting you and unwilling to do aught for you, I would like you, please dear Lord, to do something for me. Please heal my broken body so that I may go out to better enjoy the world; heal my eyes that I can the better see the moving pictures; open my deaf ears that I may enjoy the devil's jokes and gossip; heal my crippled hands that I can play cards or work for my own selfish ends; and heal my feet that I might dance and run in worldly paths!"

Oh no, those might not be the exact words uttered by the petitioning sinner's lips, but 'twould be the language of the heart, wouldn't it? And after all, it is upon the heart that the Lord looketh, and it does not seem possible that the Lord could answer that prayer for the honour and glory of his own dear name, does it?

Make an Out-and-Out Surrender. Give Him your heart freely and gladly; drink deep from the joyous wells of his salvation tell your heart overflows with the rich fullness of his love. Then come crying, "Dear Jesus — my Saviour and my Lord, the name do I worship and adore. By Thy blood have I been redeemed, my whole heart and life flows out to Thee in gladness and surrender for service great or small. Take me, and use me, I pray.

"But, oh, dear Lord — this body is sick and frail. I come to Thee for healing and strength that I may serve Thee better and help lead souls from darkness into light. Heal my eyes that I may read the blessed Book, my ears that I may hear the preached Word, my hands that I may minister in loving deeds to those in need, and my feet that I may run to do Thy bidding, Saviour dear. Humbly, I ask in faith for Thine own glory. Dear Lord, I do believe and take Thy promise now."

There is quite a difference in the heart language of those two prayers, is there or not? And it does seem as though one could pray this latter prayer with much more assurance and confidence.

Do not seek salvation for the sake of being healed; but after seeking and finding the Saviour, then come for deliverance from sickness and pain, that you may henceforth live for Him who died for you.

Having read of the miracles of healing our Lord hath wrought, people often rush into the meetings from distant places, saying, "Pray for me quick, sister. I've got to catch a train or leave for home tomorrow." But they have not sat long under the preaching of the gospel till, when asked if they feel that they are now ready to go to the altar for prayer, they almost invariably reply, "Oh no, let me wait a day longer. I have a few more letters to write asking forgiveness, a few more things to make right, a couple more bills to pay, et cetera." Bless the Lord, the Spirit has been working in their hearts, and instead of rushing pell-mell without thought or preparation into the most holy and righteous presence of the King of kings, asking His pure, nail-pierced hands to be laid upon our sinful, selfish bodies, they are coming now with clean hands and a pure heart, entering humbly under the covering of the precious blood.

Do Not Come on Your Own Merits. "But I have been such a wicked sinner," some other heart may cry. "My life has been wasted. Would He ever hear my cry? Would He save, heal, and baptize me with His precious Holy Spirit? Am I not too sinful, sick, and broken of body and soul?"

Indeed, He will hear your cry, dear one. He came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. You are just the one that He will hear. When Jesus walked the earth, none were too sinful for Him to save, none too sick for Him to heal.

And it has been a noticeable fact that the new convert, filled with humility and a sense of his own unworthiness, often receives healing much more quickly than they who have been Christian workers for many years, and who now come of their own merits, filled with a sense of their own goodness and importance.

“Why, I am Mrs. So-and-So. I’ve done this, that, and the other for the Lord for so many years, I am sure that He will heal me.” But oh, it is not upon your *own* merits, righteousness, or even service that we can claim the promise, for all that we have done, after all, is but our reasonable service. ‘Tis the merits and righteousness of Jesus that we must plead. Coming in humility, we find that, indeed, when we are weak, then are we strong, for He resists the proud but gives grace unto the humble.

“Have you faith that Jesus will heal you now?” we often ask the sick who come for prayer. In dealing with old Christians, we frequently meet the following complacent, self-satisfied answer in a tone that would indicate that they almost resented the fact that we felt the necessity of such a question: “Oh my, yes! Why, I have always had faith.”

“How long have you been ill, sister, and crippled up in this wheelchair?”

“About 10 years.”

“And yet you say, in an offhand, assured way, with a little wave of your hand, ‘Oh yes, indeed, I have always had faith.’ Why don’t you see, my dear, that if you really had faith, that is, the instantaneous mountain-moving faith, for the fraction of a second, the work would be done, and this captive body would be free? Get out of that self-satisfied, boastful complacency, and in humility, heart-searching, and earnest prayer draw near with sincerity and unfeigned faith unto the Lord.”

The Difference between “Passive” and “Active” Faith. Having been converted, having made peace with the brother who had aught against thee as far as lieth in your power and having put your all upon the altar in sacrifice, you are now coming to Christ for healing.

Come with radiant, active faith; pray earnestly, pray believing, nothing doubting, and you will feel His mighty hand upon your life. His power will thrill through your being, and the same Spirit that raised up Jesus from the dead will quicken your mortal body.

“Just what do you mean by ‘active’ faith? Is there more than one kind of faith?” I hear someone ask.

Yes, there is passive faith and active faith. There is an instantaneous faith that takes the promise now; there is a steady, unwavering faith that can stand the test, and though the vision tarry, wait for it, growing daily in strength as young trees grow in stature.

The one with “passive” faith says, “I will be prayed for, and *if* it is His will to heal me, I will be restored to health” — but right there is an “if,” small in itself but a most mighty stumbling block to faith.

Had the woman with the issue of blood sat by the wayside saying, “Well, if it is His will to heal me, I am willing. I will just sit here at ease, and if he happens to come to me and hear me, all right; if not, all right, but I will make no great effort until he does, “do you think she would ever have been made whole? It was her “active faith” that pressed through the throng and touched the Master’s robe that brought about her healing.

“Passive” faith just stands there and lets someone else do all the praying, hoping to be healed and willing for it if it comes, but making no real effort to reach out and take it by active faith. Hope, however, is not faith, though many mistake the one for the other.

An Example of the Difference between the Two. Let me tell you the true story of something that happened in one of our meetings, which exemplifies the difference between “active” and “passive” faith.

During the great revival campaign in the Memorial Hall, of Dayton, Ohio, the Lord had graciously poured His Spirit upon us in a most marvelous way. Thousands were seeking the Lord as their Saviour, Healer and Baptizer.

The auditorium was packed, almost to suffocation. The basement also was filled. Policemen and firemen were struggling with the multitude who thronged the streets without. Well friends who carried the sick who had been crowded out had, in desperation, resorted to cutting out the basement windows and passing in their afflicted on beds to those within. From early morning until late at night, the throngs had continued to stand. And now, within the building, on the great platform, prayer was still being offered for the sick.

Many mighty healings were resulting. Deaf ears were unstopped, and the lame had been made to leap for joy. As quickly as one roll of supplicants was prayed for, another would take its place. We who were praying for the sick turned now to the new role.

The first was a man with a stout walking stick in his hand, whose limb was held painfully and straight before him. The man appeared to have absolutely no burden of prayer but was sitting up straight in his chair, gazing about him with wide-open eyes, watching the workers and the people as they came and went. I looked at him searchingly with the thought that is ever uppermost in the mind when praying for the sick. Has he faith— active, mountain-moving faith? I was afraid that he had not.

Second in line was a dear lady with a child who was perhaps three or four years of age seated upon her lap. One arm was pressed tightly about the child; the other was raised to heaven. Her lips moved in audible prayer; tears flowed down her cheeks. Her face: no doubt as to faith there!

The Man with the Cane. Addressing first the elderly man with the inexpressive face and the open eyes, I asked: “well, brother dear, have you faith that Jesus will heal you now?”

“Why, I certainly hope he will,” he made answer.

“But, brother, have you only a ‘hope so’ faith? No assurance from the Lord?”

“Why, why, I thought perhaps I could be healed; I certainly hope so.”

“Just what is your greatest reason for desiring healing, brother?” I asked, trying another tack.

“Why, to be rid of the pain, of course,” he answered testily. “But isn’t it even just a little bit so that you could serve the Lord and work for Him with all your heart and strength?” I persisted.

“W-w-ell, I suppose so,” he spoke hesitatingly, without conviction, as though the thought were foreign. The man had a hard, selfish face, and we could not help wondering whether he had ever made a real sacrifice for the Lord Jesus in his life.

There was nothing to do but offer a prayer for the man, of course. But, oh, that living, vital faith one so covets when praying for the afflicted seemed to have been sinking away, down out of sight, and all we could do, after we had prayed, was to turn to the man and say, “According to your faith being done onto you.”

“Now, brother”—we tried to smile bright encouragement—“do you take the promise? Come! Rise to your feet in Jesus’ name. If you but have faith, you can walk from this platform straight and strong in every whit whole, leaving your cane behind you.”

As I spoke I succeeded in getting him to his feet; faith was springing up in my own heart, and I have the assurance that even now, if he could but grasp the promise, he would be made whole.

“Come! Brother—forget the cane, lean upon the Lord, and walk in Jesus’s name!”

“O-h-h! But I couldn’t walk without the cane, Sister! My limb has been sore so long,” he cried in a startled voice, without even trying to walk, and taking a tighter grasp upon his cane.

We groaned within our spirits, and the man, clinging to the stick, hobbled away. Only a moment, however, could be spared in following him with a regretful gaze. Hundreds of others were waiting for prayer—hundreds who would have real active faith.

The Mother and the Paralyzed Child. Next in line was the mother with the little daughter who had been afflicted with infantile paralysis.

The mother’s lips were still moving in prayer as with closed eyes and tearstained cheeks she clasped her child to her breast and rocked gently to and fro with an intensity of emotion and faith that appeared to be oblivious to all surroundings. Scarcely the need to ask the question here—“Mother dear, have you faith that Jesus will heal the little darling now and make her walk and run again?”

She opened eyes that were red with weeping but in which there glowed a light kindled by the taper of faith, and cried, “Indeed, I have faith, Sister. I have prayed through. I just know that it shall be done. This paralysis must go. My child will walk in Jesus’ name.”

Oh, what blessed faith had she! Of such as she it was that Jesus spake, saying, “I have not seen such faith, no, not in all Israel.” With every word she had uttered, we could feel our own faith mounting; no long prayer needed here! The praying had been done in advance.

“According to thy faith, be it done unto you. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, be thou made whole!”

“Put the little darling down on her feet, mother dear. Dry your tears, and take your little girl by the hand. She will walk.”

And she did, too, only Mamma went to slowly, and the pretty little darling let go of the mother’s hand and ran and danced across the platform, perfectly whole. What a novelty it was to have that paralyzed side paralyzed no longer! How grand to use that little foot! She would run a little, then stop short, lift up the foot, look at it, inquiringly and approvingly, then skip some more, like a little lamb gamboling in the field, then stop again and turn the foot in all directions, gazing at it delightedly ere she ran and danced some more. The delighted audience laughed and shouted and wept all in the same breath.

The happy mother lifted up her clasped hands and cried, “Oh Jesus! I just knew You’d do it: I just knew it! And oh, I thank Thee, Lord. I will give Thee my love, my strength, my all, and ever bring her up in Thy paths, dear Saviour.”

Do you see the difference, dear one? Here was a woman with active faith. She cried, and the Lord heard her, and according to her faith did she receive.

Don't Lose Faith if Healing Not Instantaneous. Very often the Lord heals his children instantaneously, and yet there are some who are healed gradually and begin to mend from that hour.

Active faith is more necessary than ever before.

This was exemplified by our dear Sister Fraga, of Dayton, Ohio, whom so many have learned to know and love. She came to the meeting on crutches; she was frightfully deformed, with dislocated hips that have been out of their sockets for years. When prayed for, she reached out to Jesus in simple, childlike faith and said that she could feel the hips snapping back into place. She let the crutches fall from under her arms and, declaring that she was healed, walked away, something that she had not been able to do before.

But though the hips were gradually going back into the sockets, the body was still far from straight, and we used to catch a breath when Mrs. Fraga rose to testify (as she was wont to do at each testimony meeting) and declare that she was healed. Then, gradually, day by day, as this precious sister turned her house into a home of prayer, brought her husband to Jesus, prayed with sinners at the altar, went out for miles to pray for and bring others to the meetings, her lameness began to disappear.

We saw this dear sister one year after she had been prayed for, and she was as trim and as straight as a girl. She was still ministering to the sick and afflicted, walking for miles with perfect ease, for, as she said, only they who have been in trouble, bound with braces of steel and leather, tortured by crutches in pain, could ever fully and sympathize and yearn with such a full heart to succor those who walk in the path of affliction.

Here again was active faith that stepped out on the promise, as even Peter stepped out on the water and walked to meet the Lord. She had held fast through sunshine and tempest, believing that he who had begun the good work was also able to perfect it.

Have Faith in God. Remember that faith is not always accompanied by feelings. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. Whether you were healed instantly or gradually, hold fast to the promise. In the Bible we read of some who came to Jesus that "as they went they were healed." Just so today there are some who see little visible indication of healing at the moment they are prayed for. But this is the very time to have faith and to hold fast. If they should wait a moment or so without feeling any great surge of healing power and then walk away with downcast face, saying, "Oh, I was prayed for a moment ago, but I feel no different. I guess this is not for me," then, according to their faith shall it be done. Remember, faith is not feeling, and trust is not trace. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who is this very moment measuring and testing the quantity and quality of your faith. Cling to the words of Isaiah: "By His stripes we are healed. "Lift your heart to Jesus and say, "By Thine own suffering at the whipping post, Thou didst bear my sickness and pain; mine eyes are upon Thee, dear Lord. By faith I lay hold upon the promise. The work is completed in Thee; complete it now in me, oh Lord."

Step Out Boldly upon the Promise. Pray through before you come to Christ for healing; then come with perfect faith in Jesus and His power to heal. When you lay aside that cane or those crutches after prayer, do not put one foot out hesitatingly and say, “Um, now I wonder if I could take a step on that foot. I wonder if I could bear my weight on it? It’s been a pretty sore foot! Now . . . let’s see! I’m going to try.”

No, no! That is not faith!

Do you suppose that Peter would ever have been able to walk on the water to meet his Lord had he put one foot rather dubiously on the wave and said, “Let’s see now . . . I wonder if that water will bear my weight? I know that the Lord bade me come, but this water is pretty soft, and I’m pretty heavy, but I’ll try it and see!”

Why, no, he would have sunk in a moment; ‘twas faith that kept Peter up—faith in Jesus; as soon as he got his eyes off the Christ and fixed them fearfully upon the tempestuous waves or circumstances with which he was surrounded, he began to sink.

According to thy faith be it done unto thee. Do not fix your eyes upon your own condition or surroundings. Fix your eyes on Jesus; have faith and walk to meet him in gladsome love and service, and the answer will come.

Going Home to Heaven. “But supposing that it is not His will to heal me? Supposing he wants to take me home to heaven?”

Well, amen! That is a different matter; your coronation day is at hand. Blessed are they that die in the Lord.

Paul was in a strait between two as to whether ‘twere best to stay to serve and minister unto his brother or to depart, declaring that to be “absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.” If the Saviour has spoken to your heart and is calling you home, Hallelujah, there is nothing to fear if your heart is washed in the blood of the Lamb. For you, death has lost its sting and the grave its victory. When thou passest through the waters, the Lord will be with thee, and the waters shall not overflow. But we do believe that the Lord’s little children do not need to die screaming with convulsions and pain. We read of our fathers that “they fell asleep.”

“Safe in the arms of Jesus, safe on His gentle breast; there by His love protected, sweetly my soul shall rest.”

If you have the blessed assurance that the Lord is calling you to that golden shore, you will, of course, be longing and ready to go; but if, on the other hand, you still have years to spend below, there is work to be done. Thousands are perishing in sin on every hand. You can be quickened and healed and made every whit whole through Jesus’ mighty power, and can then go forth into service, great or small, be it at home or abroad. You may become a soul winner for the Master, that when He calls you, you will not be empty-handed.

In gazing upon the sinner who has just given his heart to Jesus and in his illness is very near the other shore, this verse always comes to mind:

Must I go and empty-handed,
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Bring no soul with which to greet Him;
Lay no trophies at His feet?

How I covet at least a few months of service for them that when the last summons comes, they, too, shall “come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves.”

Oh, the multitude we have seen come to Jesus for healing! Our ears still ring with the glad shout of the blind when they received their sight and cried loud, “Oh, I can see! I can see. Dear people, dear Jesus, I can see again.” We still see the overjoyed, almost rapt expression of those whose deaf ears had been suddenly opened, so that they have been liberated from the tomb of silence and unable to hear the songs of praise to Jesus and the voices of their loved ones. Again we can see the lame, leaping and fairly dancing for joy, crutches, braces, and canes thrown away, and hear the testimonies of those whose cancers and tumors have melted away.

Step into Bethesda’s pool by faith today, dear heart, and thy faith shall make thee whole.

Divine Healing: How to Keep It

Having received your healing from the loving hand of Jesus, the next thing is to keep it.

“Oh, is there a possibility of my losing my healing after receiving it?” you ask.

Is there a possibility of a discharged patient who has just recovered from pneumonia up going out into the blasts of wintry winds and coming down with double pneumonia so that his latter condition is worse than the former?

“Is there a possibility of a sinner coming to this altar for conversion, being washed in the blood of Jesus and forgiven of his sin, going out into the world among godless companions, and forgetting his vows to the Lord?”

Why, yes, we hear of such things every day.

Then it is also possible for a man or woman to receive the divine healing touch of Jesus Christ upon their bodies, and then to depart from his paths into doubt, criticism, and sin, and not only lose the healing but become more ill than before.

Remember that Christ is the vine; we are the branches. In healing, as in salvation, we have no separate life of our own. In Him we move and live and have our being. Sever the branch from the vine, and it is bound to perish and wither away.

Jesus said, “Go thy way and sin no more lest a worse thing come upon thee.”

The very hour in which your healing has begun, look about you, and begin to minister to those in need. This new light and life and strength are not given you for selfish purposes but to spend and be spent in His service.

When Jesus touched the hand of Peter’s wife’s mother, the fever left her, and she rose and ministered unto them. Will you not do the same? For every bit of strength you give Him, He will repay you a hundredfold. Hallelujah!

Walk in the Spirit; spend much time in reading his Word and seeking his face in prayer, but no time in doubtful disputations.

Give not only of your love and service but of your means to Jesus, also. A man came into one of the meetings one time on crutches. He was on his way to San Francisco, there to undergo a surgical operation upon his limb. The Lord graciously healed him in answer to prayer. The man was overjoyed as he hung his crutches upon a nearby post in the tabernacle. His joy, however, was not only in that the painful operation was no longer necessary but in that he had saved five hundred dollars. But oh, could he have poured those five hundred dollars into the treasuries of the Lord for foreign missionary work or the spreading of the gospel at home, how much more blessed a thanks offering that would have been. In fact, this would have been but his “reasonable service.” That which he gave above this would have been a thank offering. Give and it shall be given unto you, good measure, heaped up, and running over.

Establish a family altar in your home. Keep the light brightly burning. Begin today to win others for Christ. Do not try to see how little but how much you can do and give.

It is, I repeat, a very sacred thing to ask the divine touch of the Lord upon these mortal bodies, and if we would keep our physical healing, we should walk with the Master.

Through correspondence sent through the *Bridal Call*, we have been enabled to keep in personal touch with large numbers of those converted and healed in the meetings. A great cloud of witnesses are standing true after several years have elapsed and are still permanently healed.

On the other hand, there are some who were mildly touched by God who have lost their healing. Such a one was a young man in Illinois, whose paralysis was healed instantaneously in answer to prayer in a meeting held there in a Methodist church.

Delightedly he slung his crutches over his shoulder and stroll down the aisle, smiling broadly. From the meeting he went to the back room of a worldly place of amusement in which his old companions in sin were playing a game of poker and gambling. After having shown them how easily he could walk without his crutches and having paced the room several times with ease, he sat down at their insistent urging, dealt the cards, procured his stack of chips, played the game, and gambled with them. In the midst of the game, the numbness flowed back into his limbs; the paralysis returned. He not only lost his healing but was worse than before. Go thy way and sin no more, lest a worst thing to come up on thee.

The Lord did not promise His blessing and protection to the sinner and the scornful but promised His blessing to “the man that walkest not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditates day and night.”

To those who walk closely to Him and meditate in His law (that is, read His Word, the Bible, and think upon earnestly), He promises, “and he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”

But if, instead of walking a holy, sober, God-fearing life with Jesus, he goes back to his theatre, dance hall, card party, seat of the scornful and selfish life not lived for the glory of God, the branch is severed from the true vine, and this protection and abounding life and strength is not promised unto him, for “The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff that the wind drive us away . . . for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Ps. 1:6).

I would not dare come to the altar for anointing in prayer for healing unless solemnly, from that hour, I pledged heart and life to do His bidding and I meant to walk in his blessed way.

Avoid foolish talking, idle conversation, gossip, and criticism. There is not a more deadly enemy to the health of soul and body than an uncovered tongue. ‘Tis as though one hand pumped and pumped water from the river into a great reservoir, for life and irrigation purposes, and then foolishly opened the gates of the sluice box and let it all run back into the river again.

It is possible to talk, just, or criticize away, between meetings, all the strength, blessing, and healing what is gained in meeting.

A society woman was one of the many to be healed in Denver, Colorado. Her deaf ears had been instantly unstopped in answer to prayer, and she went away rejoicing.

Sometime later, however, she returned with all the joy and light gone and complained to my mother that the healing had not been permanent and that the deafness had gradually returned after a few days.

The little mother looked thoughtfully at the lady awhile as she stood there, dressed in the height of fashion, then questioned her as to how she had been occupying her time since being prayed for.

“Why, just doing the ordinary things,” she replied and a surprised tone, as though wondering what that had to do with the subject.

“Such as what?” questioned Mother persistently.

“Just the duties entailed by my social standing.”

“Bridge parties, I presume?”

“Oh, certainly!”

“Theatres, parties, a ball, a new fashionable evening dress, a little gossip and exchanging of idol nothings over the teacups?”

“Why, yes,” she admitted. “Just the usual things . . .”

But right there Mother had put her finger on the reason for the woman losing her healing. It means something to keep your healing.

Pray, read your Bible, spend and be spent in his service, testify as to what he has done for you, and resist the enemy when he assails.

Testify. Testify at every possible opportunity as to what the Lord has done for you. “They overcame by the blood of the lamb and the word of the testimony,” we are told of those triumphantly sweeping up the glory-way, in Revelation. Exalt the power of the Lord Jesus. Give Him glory and praise for what He has done.

Remember the ten lepers whom Jesus cleansed. Only one came back to bear witness. The Lord said, “Were not ten lepers cleansed, but where are the nine?” Will you not be the one to return with the testimony? You will find indeed that with each note of victory that you sound forth, added strength will be given you.

Resist Temptation. Do not imagine, for a moment, that the devil will allow such a great victory as that which has been right in your life to be accomplished without resistance. Every inch of ground will be disputed. He has several methods of attack.

One of his methods is to raise up unbelievers about you who will try to sow the seed of doubt in the heart, just at the time when you stand most in need of help and encouragement.

Another is to bring back the old symptoms and twinges of pain, saying, “Aha! You thought you were healed, didn’t you? But look at these waves piling up on every side. You cannot walk up on these waters much longer. Don’t you feel that pain? Doesn’t that prove that you are not healed?”

But keep your eyes upon Jesus. Lift up your heart and begin to praise the Lord; resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Do not let the enemy corner you in Doubting Castle; keep out in the sunshine of Jesus’ smile. Lift your

voice in audible praise to Jesus and prove indeed that the “joy of the Lord is your strength.” Remember that all things are possible to them that believe and that faith is the master key that opens the door of every promise castle of God’s Word.

Another ruse of the enemy is to take the eyes of the Lord’s children from off the righteousness of Jesus and the finished work of Calvary, and fix them upon their own imperfections and blemishes.

A dear young lady was taken from a bed in which she had lain suffering for a year and a half following seven abdominal operations. After consecrating her life to Jesus, this beautiful girl (at that time a little more than skin and bones) was prayed for. Jesus healed her of intestinal disorders and adhesions. Four months she walked in victory, enjoying more liberty and real happiness than she had ever known, for she had been afflicted since a child.

Then came the time when she was preparing to attend a big revival meeting in the very city in which her victory had been gained, there to give her testimony.

Could the enemy allow this without a struggle? No! He came in like a flood with recurring symptoms of old-time pain, and when the dear sister lifted troubled eyes and asked why this had come, the devil began to accuse her, declaring that she must have done something wrong, failed somewhere, or fallen into sin.

Ah, how cunning the enemy is! Full well he knows that if he can get our eyes off the righteousness of Jesus, and center them upon our own unworthiness, we sink like Peter of old. Each time, her tender conscience would cringe and say, “Oh! I must’ve sinned or have done something wrong, though I do not know what it can be.” The lash would fall again on her quivering spirit, and the clouds roll more sickly o’er her sky.

At last she came to us about the subject, asking that we would pray and inquire of the Lord wherein the trouble lay. She stated that she had searched her heart, read the Word, and cried out to the Lord, and that though she knew she must’ve sinned terribly somehow, someway, she did not know where the trouble lay.

In prayer, the Lord showed me that the devil was still the “accuser of the brethren” today as in the days of old. Gathering the trembling little form into my arms, I told her that it was the devil and not the Lord that stood over her with the stinging lash and the threatening, intimidating air, saying, “Now, you bad girl, you have sinned somewhere. You have prayed and wept and done the best you knew, but though I will not show you what it is, you have done something wrong somewhere and must suffer for it.”

“Oh, darling,” I said, “Does this sound like the voice of Jesus? No! His voice is loving and tender. When he speaks, he says, “Come, poor, tired child, and lay your head upon my breast. Let Me enfold thee with My love and wrap thee about with My presence and support. Gaze upon me. Harken unto My words till your soul is filled with music and you are transformed into Mine own image.”

“Here you have been listening to the enemy all this time. Every time he spoke, you put your hand to your ear, bent closer to him, and said, “What did you say, devil? What’s that you say?”

“Oh, my dear, listen to him no more! Resist the oppression of the evil one. Throw his yoke from off your neck. He whom the Son sets free, is free indeed! Rise up and take your liberty.”

She saw the light through the clouds, rose up in victory—the pain was gone, the enemy fled like vanquished shades of night before the rising sun of the morning—and she was free. The enemy had come in like a flood, but the Lord had raised up a standard against him.

She attended the revival, became an active winner of souls, and by her testimony reached the hearts and ears of thousands.

Hold Fast to the Promise. Hold fast to the promise, seeking his glory. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber” (Ps. 121:3).

“But thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee” (Isa. 26:3).

If you hold fast to Him, He will hold fast to you, for He has promised that, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth” (Rev. 3:10).

“And now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever, Amen” (Jude 1:24-25).

The Healing Ministry of Jesus

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ABSTRACT:

This article reviews all the relevant passages of Jesus' healings, organized by the methods he utilized, especially noting how Jesus' approach was practical, focusing upon the complete healing of the person. The medium of touch was the most common healing method in the ministry of Jesus, though a healing command, combination of word and touch, or on rare occasions, healing agents such as saliva, mud, and washing were utilized. The variety of healing methods demonstrate that Jesus was not dependent upon any specific approach but was focused on the effective transference of healing power. Thus, Jesus was an effective healer whose success came from the power he possessed rather than the methods he utilized.

Introduction

Jesus instructed John's disciples, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them" (Matt 11:4–5; cf. Luke 7:22).² The ministry of Jesus focused primarily on proclaiming the good news, as well as releasing the benefits of the coming kingdom—especially in the form of miracles of healing, which both legitimized the proclamation of the gospel³ and demonstrated God's compassion for the weak.⁴

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² A comprehensive examination of the purpose of the miracles of Jesus is beyond the scope of the current study. The focus here is on the usage of touch for healing by Jesus, as reported by the gospel writers. For selected studies on the miracles of Jesus, see Barry Blackburn, "The Miracles of Jesus," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (eds. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; NTTS 19; New York: Brill, 1994), 353–94; C. Blomberg, "Healing," *DJG*, 299–307; Peder Borgen, "Miracles of Healing in the New Testament: Some Observations," *ST* 35 (1981): 91–106; Reginald Fuller, *Interpreting the Miracles* (London: SCM, 1963); Herman Hendrickx, *The Miracle Stories of the Synoptic Gospels* (Studies in the Synoptic Gospels; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Van der Loos, *The Miracles of Jesus* (NovTSup 9; Leiden: Brill, 1965); Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker: A Historical & Theological Study* (Downer's Grove, IVP, 1999).

For detailed treatment with emphasis on the redactional work of each evangelist, see John Tipei, "The Laying on of Hands in the New Testament" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Sheffield, 2000), 108–56. For analysis of the unique theological perspective of each gospel writer relating to miracles (not comprehensive): **For Mark:** Hogan, *Healing*, 257–67; M. Glasswell, "The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel," in *Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History* (ed. C.F.D. Moule. London: Mowbray, 1965), 150–62. **For Matthew:** John Heil, "Significant Aspects of the Healing Miracles in Matthew," *CBQ* 41 (1979): 274–87; Heinz Held, "Matthew as Interpreter of the Miracle Stories," in *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (eds. G. Bornkamm, G. Barth, and H. Held; trans. Percy Scott. NTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 165–299; Hogan, *Healing*, 268–75. **For Luke:** Paul Achtemeier, "The Lucan Perspective on the Miracles of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," *JBL* 94 (1975): 547–62; John Carroll, "Jesus as Healer in Luke-Acts," *SBLSP* 33 (1994): 269–85; Hogan, *Healing*, 238–56; George Lampe, "Miracles in the Acts of the Apostles," in *Miracles: Cambridge Studies in their Philosophy and History* (ed. C.F.D. Moule; London: Mowbray, 1965), 163–78; Marvin Miller, "The Character of Miracles in Luke-Acts" (Th.D. diss., Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA, 1971); John Pilch, "Sickness and Healing in Luke-Acts," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation* (ed. Jerome Neyrey; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 181–209; Max Turner, "The Spirit and the Power of Jesus' Miracles in the Lucan Conception," *NovT* 33.2 (1991): 124–52.

³ Helge Nielsen, *Heilung und Verkündigung: Das Verständnis der Heilung und ihres Verhältnisses zur Verkündigung bei Jesus und in der ältesten Kirche* (ATDan 22; New York: Brill, 1987), 107–53.

⁴ Howard Clark Kee, *Medicine, Miracle and Magic in New Testament Times* (SNTSMS 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 80, notes that rabbinic Judaism believed a teacher received divine confirmation by his ability to perform a miracle. If true, it might explain the request made of Jesus to perform miracles to prove his claims. However, Jesus refused to perform miracles

Healing through Touch

As we will see, Jesus used a practical healing approach that was not dependent upon a singular methodology or ritual act, doing whatever was necessary to accomplish the healing of the person. There are twenty recorded healings of Jesus; twelve of these use touch,⁵ five utilize a spoken word,⁶ two occur at a distance,⁷ and one methodology is unknown.⁸ Additionally, three of the five healing summaries of multiple healings specifically mention touch.⁹ In fact, touch (frequently accompanied by a spoken word) was a common element of the healing procedure for Jesus.¹⁰ Further, it did not seem to matter whether Jesus touched others or they touched him, because “power came out from him and healed all of them” (Luke 6:19; cf. Matt 4:23; 8:16; 14:34–36; Mark 6:53–56; Luke 4:40).

The Greek phrase, “laying on of hands” (*epitithemi cheiras*), is used interchangeably with other words for touching in the Gospels, most likely demonstrating that the laying on of hands was not fixed as a technical ritual for healing in the ministry of Jesus. Instead, the variety of terms demonstrates the diversity of healing methods utilized by Jesus himself, so that beside the laying on of hands, healing “methods” included such diverse means as using saliva or mud made with saliva, physically putting hands on eyes, in ears, on a tongue, lifting a sick person, and/or simply giving a vocal healing word (or reassurance of healing) in person, or on rare occasions, for a person not present.

For example, Mark relates two stories where Jesus was asked to perform the laying on of hands, but then did something else. In Mark 5:23, Jairus asked Jesus to come and lay hands upon his daughter in order that she might be healed and live. The request implies Jairus placed his faith in the laying on of hands itself.¹¹ When Jesus arrived, however, he simply took the young girl by the hand, and raised her with a command. In Mark 7:32–35 Jesus is brought a deaf man for the laying on of hands. Instead of laying his hands on him, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears and touched the man’s tongue, accompanied by a command of healing. In both passages, the original request for the laying

to justify his ministry, reserving healing for helping the needy alone. It is doubtful the evangelists included healing simply to authenticate the ministry of Jesus. Instead, miracles were the means of releasing kingdom blessings to those in need. Cf. Joel Green, “Jesus and a Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10–17): Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus’ Miracles,” *CBQ* 51:3 (1989): 643–54.

⁵ Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–39; Matt 8:14–15); a leper (Mark 1:40–45; Luke 5:12–16; Matt 8:1–4); a woman with issue of blood and Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21–43; Luke 8:40–56; Matt 9:18–26); a deaf man (Mark 7:31–37; Matt 15:29–31); a blind man (Mark 8:22–26); two blind men (Matt 9:27–31); two blind men (Matt 20:29–34); a widow’s son at Nain (he touched the bier) (Luke 7:11–17); a crippled woman (Luke 13:10–17); the high priest’s servant (Luke 22:49–51); a man born blind (John 9:1–41).

⁶ A paralytic (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26); a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11; Matt 12:9–14); blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43); a lame man (John 5:1–18); Lazarus (John 11:1–44).

⁷ The centurion’s servant (Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10); a royal official’s son (John 4:46–54).

⁸ A man with dropsy (Luke 14:1–6), though as Jesus took him aside, some kind of healing gesture likely is implied.

⁹ Mentioning touch: Gennesaret (Mark 6:53–56; Matt 14:34–36); Galilee (Mark 3:7–12; Matt 12:15–21; Luke 6:17–19); Capernaum (Mark 1:32–34; Luke 4:40–41; Matt 8:16–17); Not giving specific details: Galilee (Matt 4:23–25); the message to John the Baptist: (Luke 7:18–23).

¹⁰ Aune calls healing by touch “the characteristic way” in which Jesus healed the sick (“Magic in Early Christianity,” *ANRW* 23.2:1529); cf. Lohse, *TDNT* 9:432.

¹¹ Luke leaves off the reference to the laying on of hands while Matthew agrees with Mark’s account in this detail. Donald Hagner, *Matthew* (WBC, 33A–B; Dallas: Word, 1993–1995), 1:248, points out this is the only reference in Matthew to healing by “the laying on of hands,” rather than by a simple touch. That Matthew left in this detail likely demonstrates that he is not reticent to the laying on of hands for healing, but does not understand it as a *technicus terminus*, thereby feeling free to use various terms for touch in healing.

on of hands was refocused by the action of Jesus in Mark's account. The way Mark relates both matter-of-fact requests for the laying on of hands implies that Mark expected his readers to understand the request as the method Jesus would use to effect healing, making the laying on of hands conspicuous in its absence.¹²

A reversal can be found in Mark 8:22–26, which relates that some people asked Jesus to touch a blind man, assuming his touch would bestow the desired healing. After applying saliva to his eyes, Jesus laid hands upon the man's eyes to restore his eyesight; where only a simple touch was requested, Jesus performed the laying on of hands, not once but twice.¹³

A final illustration of the informal relationship between touch and the laying on of hands can be found in the healings at Peter's house (Mark 1:29–31). Mark mentions that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law by grasping her hand and lifting her up, leaving it unclear as to how the healing was accomplished.¹⁴ Matthew, however, makes the healing the direct result of Jesus' touch, (Matt 8:14–15).¹⁵ Luke, on the other hand, does not mention touch, but instead adds that Jesus rebuked the fever as if it were an entity, so that the fever departed (Luke 4:38–39).¹⁶ Between the three accounts, it is unclear whether Peter's mother-in-law was healed by a touch,¹⁷ a healing rebuke,¹⁸ or both.

All three gospel writers then relate how all the people of the town came that evening for healing (Mark 1:32–34; Luke 4:40–41; Matt 8:16–17).¹⁹ Both Mark and Matthew note that Jesus healed all that came, yet Luke specifically mentions that Jesus laid hands “on each one of them.” Whereas Luke did not mention that Jesus touched Peter's mother-in-law, Luke adds the laying on of hands quite naturally to Mark's healing summary, implying that Luke assumes it as the usual healing method of Jesus.

¹² Hogan, *Healing*, 274–5; Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 383. Tipei, “Hands,” 124, suggests the death of the girl (Luke 5:35) changed the need for the laying on of hands, as “There is not one case in any literature when hands were laid on a corpse.”

¹³ This is the only recorded instance when Jesus asked someone how they were doing after receiving healing ministry, and the only time Jesus laid his hands on someone twice.

¹⁴ Robert Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26* (WBC 34A; Dallas: Word, 1989), 62, asserts the key is that Jesus grasped her hand. Cf. Str-B 2:2–3 for rabbinic parallels.

¹⁵ Hendrickx, *Stories*, 76–77. Rather than Mark's grasping (*kratēsas*), Matthew mentions a simple touch (*hapsato*). This tends to undermine Guelich's argument (see previous note), for had the acts of grasping implied the transfer of healing power, one would suppose Matthew would have used *krateō* as well. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC 22; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 143, suggests that for one to touch a woman in this manner was forbidden “by at least some Jewish traditions.” In the same vein, Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:209, notes that touching a person with a fever was forbidden in rabbinic tradition as well (cf. St-B 1:479–80).

¹⁶ Hendrickx, *Stories*, 71, asserts that this reflects the conviction that “behind all sickness is the working of Satan.” Hogan suggests Luke transformed the healing into an exorcism (*Healing*, 239–40, 247; cf. Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 225). I. H. Marshall notes “nothing more than personification of the malady may be present” (*The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 195; cf. R. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (NITCG; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 108; cf. Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 86–7). E. P. Sanders and Margaret Davies suggest this has more to do with Luke's propensity to pair male and female stories, and thus is repeating the “rebuke” of the previous exorcism of the man with an unclean spirit paired the pericope with it more directly (*Studying the Synoptic Gospels* (London: SCM, 1989), 279; cf. Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28–28A; New York: Doubleday, 1970–1985), 1:550).

¹⁷ Alan Cole, *The Gospel According to Mark* (2^d ed.; TNTC 2; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 115.

¹⁸ Marshall, *Luke*, 195.

¹⁹ For discussion on the nature of the different types of healings and their implication for NT study, see Reinhard von Bendemann, “‘Many-Coloured Illnesses’ (Mark 1:34): On the Significance of Illnesses in New Testament Therapy Narratives,” in *Wonders Never Cease*, 100–124.

At issue is that the laying on of hands does not appear to be a set phrase for healing in the Gospels but is used interchangeably with other words for touch. It is not so much that “to touch,” “to grasp,” “to lift up,” and “to lay hands” were considered as being equivalent, than it is that the touching of Jesus did not always rise to the level of a formal ritual of the laying on of hands. Thus, an evangelist might add or leave out “the laying on of hands” in respect to parallel gospel accounts, sometimes seeming to assume the reader will otherwise understand that touch has taken place as part of the healing process. For example, whereas Mark notes that Jairus requested that Jesus lay hands on his daughter, Luke fails to mention the requested laying on of hands (Mark 5:23; Luke 8:40), but does include the later mention by Mark that Jesus took the girl’s hand (Mark 5:41; Luke 8:54). On two other instances, Luke included the laying on of hands not otherwise found in Mark (Luke 4:40; Mark 1:34; 13:13=no par.).²⁰

Matthew did not use “the laying on of hands” for the action of Jesus in healing, yet he did include it in Jairus’ request to Jesus (Matt 9:18), and otherwise Matthew narrates Jesus using touch for healing (Matt 8:3, 15; 9:18; 9:29; 20:34), thereby apparently simply avoiding usage of the technical phrase. On the other hand, Matthew used the laying on of hands twice in the blessing of the children (Matt 19:13–15), demonstrating he did not have an aversion to using the term outside of healing. Thus, it seems that Mark and Luke did not distinguish clearly between “touch” and “the laying on of hands” in the ministry of Jesus, while Matthew used the laying on of hands for healing only once. As Tipei observes:

“The laying on of hands,” at least when employed to describe a healing, is not a technical term but forms part of a complex of “touching” terms (ἐπιτίθημι/ταῖς χεῖρσιν, ἀπτεσθαι, κρατεῖν, ἐπιλαμβάνειν, πιάζειν) which are often used indiscriminately as indicators of the establishment of physical contact between the bearer of numinous power and the person in need. The form of the gesture is not important in healing . . . the one thing which counts is the intentionality of the physical contact.²¹

The lack of a fixed ritual or method for the healing ministry of Jesus implies that the evangelists have minimized touch as the *cause* rather than the *procedure*, focusing instead upon Jesus himself as the *source* of healing. This keeps a balance between any type of touch being effective when connected to the source—namely, Jesus—without crossing over into magical practice where correct procedure is the source.

Since the laying on of hands and touch seem to be used interchangeably in the Gospels, it is doubtful that there was a recognized methodology for how the laying on of hands was performed, or that a clear distinction can be made between the two. Apparently, the evangelists understood the touch of Jesus, in whatever form, to transfer his power and accomplish what was needed. Nonetheless, a number of passages use the *technicus terminus* when referring to the touch of Jesus for healing.

²⁰ On the four occasions in which Mark mentioned the laying on of hands, Luke left three of the stories completely out of his narrative (Mark 6:5; 7:32; 8:23–25). Cf. González, “Ritual,” 104–16; Joel Green, *Luke*, 226.

²¹ Tipei, “Hands,” 97.

In Nazareth Jesus was unable to perform many miracles due to their lack of faith (Mark 6:5; Matt 13:58).²² The scarcity of both miracles and faith in Nazareth are a contrast with the plethora of miracles observed throughout the rest of Jesus' ministry,²³ especially with the great faith demonstrated by the Gentiles who had encountered Jesus elsewhere.²⁴ Yet Jesus did indeed "lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" (Mark 6:5). It seems that if any were to receive healing it would be through the initiation of Jesus. In that circumstance, Jesus used "the laying on of hands" among those who were willing.

In the case of the woman crippled "by a Spirit that had bound her for eighteen years" so that she could not stand straight (Luke 13:10–17), Jesus proclaimed that she was set free from her ailment and laid hands on her.²⁵ While this incident is possibly an example of exorcism by the laying on of hands, the passage does not include a rebuke of the demon, or other common characteristics of exorcistic practice.²⁶ Possibly, the reference to her having a spirit of weakness refers to being broken in spirit from the infirmity, as opposed to her having an unclean spirit. Ultimately, the woman was released instantly as a direct result of the laying on of hands,²⁷ for to touch Jesus is to touch the power within him.²⁸

The healing methodology of Jesus was not solely dependent upon the ritual action of the laying on of hands, but also often through a simple touch. Thus, healing was not released from the correct hand-laying procedure—correct placement of hands, number of hands used, right healing words, etc.—but through personal, often physical, contact with Jesus, where Jesus was focused primarily upon the effective release of healing power.

Consequently, we find an array of touching motions mentioned, ranging from formal "the laying on of hands" to casual gestures of touch, even as simple as Jesus lifting someone by the hand. In addition, it did not seem to matter who initiated the contact, but whether or not people were healed—even people who merely touched his clothes, or the

²² Hendrickx, *Stories*, 17, notes that almost two-thirds of the references to faith occur in relation to miracles. Cf. Twelftree, *Miracle Worker*, 99–101.

²³ Gundry, *Mark*, 293.

²⁴ Twelftree, *Miracle Worker*, 99–101. Roloff suggests the reason Jesus did not heal at Nazareth is the people could not believe in him as the bringer of the eschatological kingdom that included healing (*Das Kerygma und der irdische Jesus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970), 159). Lane notes, "It is not Mark's intention to stress Jesus' inability when he states that he could perform no miracles at Nazareth. His purpose is rather to indicate that Jesus was not free to exercise his power in these circumstances" (*Mark*, 204; cf. Anton Fridrichsen, *The Problem of Miracle in Primitive Christianity* (trans. Roy Harrisville and John Hanson; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 78–79).

²⁵ The pericope is only recorded by Luke, especially noteworthy since Luke generally leaves the laying on of hands out of his healing narrative, even when present in Mark. Luke also added the laying on of hands to the healing summary at Peter's house (Luke 4:40) as discussed above.

²⁶ Contra Eric Sorensen, *Possession and Exorcism in the New Testament and Early Christianity* (WUNT 2.157; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 137, who asserts that while Mark clearly separates exorcisms from healings, with the former entirely by command and the latter mostly by touch, Luke has thoroughly blended the two here, and portrays Jesus freeing the woman from the spirit both by word and touch. Cf. Tipei, "Hands," 134–40. John Wilkinson, "The Case of the Bent Woman in Luke 13:10–17," *EvQ* 49 (1977): 195–205, notes, "Jesus' reference to the bond of Satan does not mean that this woman was demon-possessed. What it does mean is that her condition was due to the activity of Satan as the primary cause of sin and disease."

²⁷ Green suggests Jesus laid hands upon the woman, "as a consequence and expression of his mission" (emphasis his) to release kingdom blessings upon "this neglected daughter of Abraham" ("Daughter," 651–2).

²⁸ Achtemeier, "Miracles," 551–7.

fringe of his clothes. What binds these elements together is that some direct physical contact was made between Jesus and the person in need.²⁹

On several occasions Jesus touched someone incidentally as part of their healing. For example, in the account of a man healed with dropsy, we are told that Jesus took hold of the man, healed him and then sent him away (Luke 14:1–6). Here the exact method of healing is unclear, but touch seems to be implied as part of the healing process. In another example, we are told that Peter attempted to walk on water but became terrified and needed Jesus to help him back to the boat (Matt 14:28–33). The account implies Jesus empowered Peter through touch and they walked back together. In the pericope of the transfiguration of Jesus (Matt 17:1–8), the disciples fell in fear at hearing God speak. Matthew relates that Jesus came and touched them and told them to arise. The account seems to convey the touch of Jesus provided strength, as it would have been unnecessary otherwise.³⁰ This passage quite possibly holds the key to understanding the perspective of the evangelists, namely, that no matter how subtle the touch of Jesus appears, it still has the potential to convey strength, encouragement, and healing power.

Another example of the importance of touch is noted in the story of the healing of the servant of the high priest whose ear was cut off during the arrest of Jesus (Mark 14:47; Matt 26:51; Luke 22:51; John 18:10). While the other gospel writers share nothing more, Luke notes that Jesus healed the man by touching his ear. It is noteworthy that no other healing methods, words or details are provided; since the servant sent to arrest Jesus surely did not exercise healing faith himself, Luke must have understood that the healing relied solely upon the power Jesus transmitted through his touch.

The Gospels record that Jesus often healed through a combination of a spoken word and a physical touch,³¹ demonstrating that he had both the power and authority to heal (Luke 9:1). The healing words, though, were not magical and formulaic, but words of reassurance that commanded and released healing. For example, all three Gospels tell the story of the healing of a blind man who cried out for healing: Mark 10:46–52, Luke 18:35–43, and Matt 20:29–34. In response, Mark relates that Jesus merely stated, “Go; your faith has made you well,” noting that the man regained his sight immediately. Luke adds the healing command, “Receive your sight; your faith has saved you.”

Matthew, however, tells an entirely different, yet similar story. In Matthew’s version Jesus is leaving rather than entering Jericho, and there are two rather than one who desire healing. Moreover, Matthew fails to mention the healing word or faith, instead adding that they were healed in response to Jesus touching their eyes. Since Matthew has often left out the mention of the laying on of hands, the fact that he has added the healing touch in this account is noteworthy, implying he understood touch as a usual healing method of Jesus, assuming it has taken place in this instance.³² A very similar story is found in Matt 9:29, where two blind men are healed after Jesus touches their eyes, this time with the accompanying healing words, “According to your faith will it be done to you.”

²⁹ Cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Maxmillan, 1952), 188; C. Turner, “Χειροτονία, Χειροθεσία, ἐπίθεσις χειρῶν.” *JTS* 24 (1923): 496–504.

³⁰ Though Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:495, suggests that the touch of Jesus here may have had the purpose of showing that it was the real Jesus they had seen transfigured and talking to Moses and Elijah, rather an illusion or vision.

³¹ Allen Gunther, “Divine Healing: An Exegetical Study,” (M.Th. thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1961), 91.

³² Thus, we probably should not read too much into the occasions when Matthew does not mention touch or the laying on of hands.

On another occasion, we are told a leper came to Jesus requesting healing: “If you choose, you can make me clean.” Stretching out his hand and touching him, Jesus responded, “I do choose. Be made clean!” (Mark 1:40–42; cf. Matt 8:1–4; Luke 5:12–16). Clearly the story notes that Jesus was not performing merely a ritual act, but a gracious act of compassion on a leper.³³ The response was simple yet powerful, and the leper departed cleansed. Whereas elsewhere people reached out to touch Jesus, here Jesus himself reached out to touch the leper. It would have been sufficient had Jesus only spoken a healing word, yet he chose through touch not only to accomplish the cleansing of the leper, but also to reach out in compassion,³⁴ breaking the cultic restriction on touching a leper.³⁵ As in the cultic system where someone who touched the sin offering was made holy by the offering (Lev 6:24–27), here by touching the leper, Jesus boldly proclaimed, “Be clean.” His action mirrored his words; by touching the leper Jesus not only accomplished his healing, but his cleansing as well.

Two further instances which demonstrate relationship between touch and healing words are the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:21–23, 35–43; Luke 8:40–42, 49–56; Matt 9:18–19, 23–26) and the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Matt 8:14–17; Mark 1:29–31; Luke 4:38–41). As discussed above, all accounts relate that Jairus had asked Jesus to come and lay his hands upon his daughter, but by the time Jesus arrived, she had died (Luke 8:53). When Jesus arrived, he took the hand of the young girl and raised her. Additionally, Mark and Luke relate how Jesus spoke commanding words to the girl to arise, yet the text is unclear on whether Jesus’ words or his touch was the effective agent in healing.³⁶ Whereas Mark and Luke seem to imply the girl was healed by the commanding words of Jesus, Matthew clearly implies she arose *when* Jesus took her by the hand; touch cannot be separated from healing command in this passage.³⁷ In a similar manner, in the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law, it is likewise unclear whether the touch or the healing rebuke was the effective agent in healing.

The touch of Jesus is not always clear as effecting the cure, but neither can it be ruled out. For example, when Jesus came upon a funeral in Nain, Jesus touched the bier, commanding the young man to arise (Luke 7:11–17). Here the touch may appear incidental, but then again it may actually have been the means of transferring healing power, empowering the response to the command. It seems likely the gospel writers are less interested in the manner of touch than the effect. That is, the Gospels are telling the story of Jesus, who effectively healed all who came to him.

³³ Gundry, *Mark*, 99, observes that rather than appealing to the will of God, Jesus healed according to his own will, demonstrating that Jesus had the authority within himself to heal as he pleased. Later, the disciples healed not according to their will but in the name of Jesus, calling upon his power and authority to accomplish miracles.

³⁴ Darrell Bock, *Luke 1:1–9.50* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament 3; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 474, notes, “Jesus’ word would have been sufficient, but his touch confirms his care.”

³⁵ William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 86–87; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:198. Kertelge suggests the simple touch may have been a deliberate challenge to those watching, a symbolic action demonstrating that Jesus already considered the man to be clean (*Wunder Jesu*, 64–6). Conversely, John Nolland asserts that the cultic restriction on touching lepers applied only to the priests (*Luke* (WBC 35A–C; 3 vols.; Dallas: Word, 1989–1993), 1:227).

³⁶ Gundry, *Mark*, 288, suggests touch; Guelich, *Mark*, 302, spoken words. It appears that Mark himself is not sure, which may explain why he preserved both. Tipei, “Hands,” 124, suggests the touch “conveys his life-giving power to the dead girl. But Jesus’ word is as important as his touch. Any claim that the resuscitation is accomplished exclusively by Jesus’ touch or his word goes beyond the textual evidence.”

³⁷ Tipei, “Hands,” 125 notes that since the touching of the girl takes place immediately before the miracle, that the touch “appears to be the means by which the resurrecting power is transferred to the dead child.”

The Gospels recount a number of occasions where people were no longer content to wait for Jesus to touch them; instead they mobbed him in their impatience. Mark records one such scene: “He told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him; for he had cured many, so that all who had diseases pressed upon him to touch him” (Mark 3:9–10). Passages like this paint a chaotic scene of people pressing Jesus, believing that to touch Jesus in any manner would make them well. Yet the Gospels recount that no one who did so was disappointed.³⁸

In these passages, it is clear that the method was not believed to be the effective agent in healing, but the person of Jesus himself. Thus, rather than seeking a formal ritual which symbolically represented the transfer of healing power, the crowds sought any physical contact with the person of Jesus.³⁹ Luke makes the connection even stronger: “All in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them” (Luke 6:17–19). Here Luke explicitly states that people were attempting to touch Jesus *because* power was coming out from him; they were being healed by the divine power emanating from Jesus himself.⁴⁰

A natural progression took place whereby people soon wished only to touch the clothing of Jesus. The first recorded instance is the woman who had a hemorrhage (Mark 5:27–34; Matt 9:18–26; Luke 8:40–56).⁴¹ In all three accounts, the woman secretly approached Jesus and touched his clothing, and thereby was healed.⁴² It is doubtful that the woman was interested in touching the garment of Jesus *per se*, but rather, in touching Jesus himself.⁴³ Apparently, since she did not want to be seen,⁴⁴ she surmised that touching the fringe of Jesus’ garment would go unnoticed, yet would be sufficiently the same as touching Jesus himself. Here, faith and touch have been joined together so that “the

³⁸ Cf. Gunther, “Healing,” 88–90; Twelftree, *Miracle Worker*, 99.

³⁹ Gundry, *Mark*, 157–8.

⁴⁰ Robert Tannehill, *Luke* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 114.

⁴¹ Barry Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Aner Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (WUNT 2/40; Tübingen: Mohr, 1991), 114–7, notes while healing through touch is common in Greco-Roman material, the texts where the patient touches the miracle worker are rare, and the observation that the healer felt power emanate from his person is without precedent. Thus, it is not probable that the passage simply was borrowed from Greco-Roman material. For a socio-rhetorical analysis of the different gospel perspectives, see Vernon Robbins, “The Woman Who Touched Jesus’ Garment: Socio-Rhetorical Analysis of the Synoptic Accounts” (*NTS* 33 (1987): 502–15. Robbins asserts that Mark focused on the woman’s inner perception, feelings and thoughts; Matthew on her faith; and Luke on Jesus’ power that flows through touch. For other in-depth treatments, see Blackburn, “Miracles,” 363–8; Bock, *Luke*, 793–9; Mary D’Angelo, “Gender and Power in the Gospel of Mark: The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Flow of Blood” in *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity: Imagining Truth* (ed. John Cavadini; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 83–109; Green, *Luke*, 346–9; Guelich, *Mark*, 290–300; Taylor, *Mark*, 289–93; Típei, “Hands,” 111–22.

⁴² While Mark states that she touched his clothing, both Matthew and Luke mention that she touched the *kraspedon* of Jesus’ garment, which can refer to the hem, edge, border, or tassel that was worn by the Jews on the corners of their outer garment (Nolland, *Luke*, 1:420; Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:248; Marshall, *Luke*, 344–5).

⁴³ Manfred Hutter suggests that grasping the hem of the garment in the ancient Near East was a sign of humble imploring (“Ein altorientalischer Bittgestus in Mt 9:20–22,” *ZNW* 75 (1984): 133–5). While this sense is not evident in the passage, it is possible that it was in the mind of the woman herself. If so, then her action would have been understood as a humble request to God through Jesus, rather than a demand upon his “magical” powers. Since all three accounts mention that the woman merely touched (*hapsato*) rather than grasped his clothing, at best it was only a possibility within the mind of the woman herself.

⁴⁴ Probably due to her uncleanness, cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:248; W. Albright and C. Mann, *Matthew* (AB 26; Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 111.

woman does not have to touch his body, nor does he have to lay his hands on her,” but “from the start faith was wedded to touch.”⁴⁵

The passage does not seem to differentiate between the person and clothing of Jesus.⁴⁶ Thus, instead of Mark’s “Who touched my clothing?” Luke could write, “Who touched me?” without substantially changing the meaning.⁴⁷ Moreover, as she touched Jesus’ clothing, she felt within herself her healing; at the same time Jesus felt power proceeding out of him.⁴⁸ Both felt the flow of healing power that was initiated by her touch. All three accounts note that the flow of power was not to anyone who touched Jesus indiscriminately, but it was specifically released to the woman through her faith.⁴⁹ Whether by personal touch, the touch of his extremities, or by a word at great distance, the Gospels portray Jesus as possessing great power for healing.

The Gospels relate another instance of healing through people touching the clothing of Jesus at Gennesaret (Mark 6:53–56; Matt 14:34–36).⁵⁰ In this pericope, people came from the entire region bringing their sick on mats, who were laid in such a manner to touch Jesus’ hem or possibly tassels (*kraspedon*) as he passed; all who touched it were healed. Interestingly, neither account records the proclamation of the gospel—though surely it must be assumed that Jesus preached there as well. Yet the people are only interested in one thing, to be healed of their ailments. At some point, they have come to understand his power of healing can be appropriated by touch, even the touch of the

⁴⁵ Gundry, *Mark*, 287.

⁴⁶ Hagner, *Matthew*, 1:248, observes, “The idea of being healed through even the garments worn by a holy person was not so unusual in that culture. It should not be thought of as quasi-magical. If healing power could be experienced by touching a special person directly, then it could also extend to touching what had touched that person. If there is a slight hint of magic in this, the woman’s strategy is at least commendable as a sign of deep faith in the power of Jesus.”

⁴⁷ Nolland, *Luke*, 1:420. D’Angelo, “Gender,” 98–99, notes, “It is precisely touch and the transfer of power that are foreground in the unique features of Mark’s narrative of the healing,” contending that the motif of touch as a means of healing was so common to people in Hellenistic society that it would be “entirely comprehensible to the audience of Mark,” so that they would understand that “her touch can draw out of Jesus the power she seeks and needs.”

⁴⁸ Mark and Luke observe that Jesus became aware that power had gone out from him while Matthew neglects to mention it.

⁴⁹ Cf. C. Mann, *Mark* (AB 27; Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 285. The passage should not be considered as magical since there was no attempt by Jesus to manipulate forces through rote words or actions. Instead, the power of Jesus to heal meets the woman at her faith, and she is healed—a point clearly made by Jesus. Further, as Aune, *ANRW* 23.2:1515, notes, magic is both a manipulation of forces as well as deviant behavior. While one might attempt to make the case that the woman was attempting to manipulate forces by touching the tassels of Jesus’ garment, the text gives no hint whatsoever that her action was considered deviant. It seems that the desire to touch Jesus or his garments was considered completely normal in that society (cf. Guelich, *Mark*, 299; France, *Mark*, 237). Conversely, John Hull asserts, “The power set up a sort of field around Jesus...which affected his clothing right down to the hem of his outer garment. The power works immediately and impersonally; it responds to the contact of any believing person without the knowledge or approval of the power-bearer himself...It is only touching for a deliberate purpose which can bring about this depletion of power” (*Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (SBT 2:28; London: SCM Press, 1974), 105). However, in no place in the story is it suggested that Jesus was somehow “depleted” of power, or even that his power had worked “impersonally.” Instead, the power that healed the woman was “the divine healing power which dwells in Jesus...and proceeds from him” (Taylor, *Mark*, 291).

⁵⁰ We do not know where the woman with the hemorrhage called home; it is possible she was from Gennesaret and had shared her healing upon returning home. The connection between the two stories is the touch of Jesus’ clothing, especially the touch of his *kraspedon*—a term not used by Mark in the previous story but utilized by both Mark and Matthew here. France, *Mark*, 275, speculates the area was primarily a Gentile area, possibly explaining their arguably magical thinking.

outer fringes of his clothing. Rather than rebuke them, Jesus graciously heals all who reach out to him by faith in that manner.⁵¹ Here, as elsewhere, healing power was released through a direct and deliberate touch.

Healing through Authoritative Command

The healing ministry of Jesus can be summarized into two simple methods: word and touch, often together.⁵² While touch was the most common healing method used by Jesus (occurring in twelve of twenty healing instances), Jesus was not limited to physical contact, and on five occasions healed by word alone.⁵³ On two additional occasions Jesus healed someone not present (Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10; John 4:46–54),⁵⁴ providing only an assurance that the patient was healed, with no healing command recorded. In both cases Jesus commended the faith of the one who requested the healing, which was followed by a report that the patient had been healed from the time Jesus gave his assurance.⁵⁵ The implication is that Jesus could heal by his own authority and force of his own will and was not solely dependent upon any healing technique.⁵⁶

Healing Agents

Jesus did not use medicine or other medical procedures, though he was not unaware of first-century medical practice (Luke 10:30–35).⁵⁷ On three occasions the Gospels record Jesus using spittle to heal (Mark 7:33–34; 8:23–25; John 9:6–7). In each, the person had a bodily defect rather than an illness: one was deaf and barely able to speak, the other two were blind. It is unclear why Jesus used his saliva as part of his healing method in these instances. It has been suggested by various scholars that saliva was used as a sort of impromptu anointing,⁵⁸ a “symbol of solidified breath,”⁵⁹

⁵¹ Lane, *Mark*, 240–1. Hagner, *Matthew*, 2:426, believes Jesus probably healed in his normal way—namely directly, but as there were so many people in need, they pressed around him begging to touch his garment as a more efficient means of receiving healing power.

⁵² John Wilkinson, *The Bible and Healing: A Medical and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 252; Miller, “Miracles,” 96–98.

⁵³ A paralytic (Mark 2:1–12; Luke 5:17–26); a man with a withered hand (Mark 3:1–6; Luke 6:6–11; Matt 12:9–14); blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46–52; Luke 18:35–43); a lame man (John 5:1–18); Lazarus (John 11:1–44). Aune, ANRW 23.2:1529, considers the commanding word of healing “perhaps the most characteristic technique which he used to effect both exorcisms and healings.”

⁵⁴ All of whom were Gentiles: the centurion’s servant (Matt 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10) and a royal official’s son (John 4:46–54). Cf. Hagner, *Matthew*, 206.

⁵⁵ Gunther, “Healing,” 91.

⁵⁶ Cf. Wilkinson, *Bible and Healing*, 117–9.

⁵⁷ Wilkinson, *Bible and Healing*, 252. Kee, *Medicine*, 3–4 notes that medicine uses the diagnosis of human ailments and prescribes approaches to alleviate symptoms based upon a combination of theory and the observation of the body. For analysis of the use of medicine in both the Hellenistic world and the NT, see Kee, *Medicine*; idem, *ABD* 4:659–66; Wilkinson, *Bible and Healing*.

⁵⁸ J. Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology: Its Origins and Early Development*. (Græcitas Christianorum Primæva 1. Nijmegen: Dekker & Van De Vegt, 1962).

⁵⁹ Jean Maertens, “Un rite de pouvoirs: L’imposition des mains. Part 2,” *SR* 7.1 (1978): 25. Cf. Gerald Borchert, *John 1–11* (NAC 25A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 314, “The mixing of Jesus’ spittle with dirt is somewhat reminiscent of God’s breath mixing with dirt of the earth in the miracle of human creation (Gen 2:7).”

a “carrier of his personality and power,”⁶⁰ or even as a means to disperse demonic forces.⁶¹ Although, in each case Jesus also touched the person, so it is not readily apparent whether the evangelists believed that the touch or the spittle was the means of transmitting the healing power.

Spittle was a common healing medium known for its magical and healing powers throughout the ancient world. For example, Pliny noted that if someone spits on the ground three times before applying a remedy, it will significantly increase the efficiency of the remedy (*Hist. Nat.* 28.7.36), and the spittle of the emperor Vespasian was believed to have cured a blind man (Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7; Tacitus, *Hist.* 4.81; Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 65.8).⁶²

In rabbinic literature, spittle was believed to have special healing powers: “The saliva of the firstborn of a father heals diseases of the eye, but the saliva of the firstborn of the mother does not heal” (*b. Bat.* 126b). Elsewhere the usage of spittle was branded as practicing magic and was forbidden (*t. Sanh.* 12:10; cf. *Str-B* 2:15).⁶³ Since the church did not continue the practice of using saliva, apparently it was not considered to be an essential part of a healing procedure, even though Jesus himself had used it.⁶⁴

In Mark 7:33–34, a man who was deaf and barely able to speak was brought to Jesus for the laying on of hands.⁶⁵ Instead, Jesus took him aside privately and performed a rather complex healing procedure which included placing his fingers into the man’s ears, spitting (most likely upon his own hand) and then touching the man’s tongue, looking up into heaven, sighing,⁶⁶ and giving a healing command (complete with the Aramaic word provided to the reader). The consequence was an immediate and complete healing of both the man’s hearing and speech, to the surprise of all who observed.

While each of these elements is common in Hellenistic healing and magical texts,⁶⁷ here the focus of healing is not upon the methodology, but upon Jesus as the healer (Mark 7:37).⁶⁸ The friends of this deaf-mute brought him

⁶⁰ Morton Kelsey, *Healing and Christianity: In Ancient Thought and Modern Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 80.

⁶¹ J. Wharton, “Spit,” *IDB* 4:437. For a list of primary literature demonstrating both the medicinal and magical uses of spittle, see Gundry, *Mark*, 389.

⁶² See Robinson, *Laying on of Hands*, 76–78. For additional references and discussion see C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John* (2^d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 358; Hull, *Magic*; Kertelge, *Wunder*, 157–63; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 480–1; Tipei, “Hands,” 141–5; Schlier, “eOkptu&w,” *TDNT* 2:448–9; Van der Loos, *Miracles*, 306–13; Weinreich, *Heilungswunder*.

⁶³ George Beasley-Murray, *John* (2^d ed.; WBC 36; Dallas: Word, 1999), 155.

⁶⁴ Cf. Wilkinson, *Bible and Healing*, 117.

⁶⁵ Mark assumes that the reader will understand the request for the laying on of hands was a request for healing. “So often has Jesus used this gesture to heal people that here it stands for the desired healing itself” (Gundry, *Mark*, 383). Lane, *Mark*, 266, suggests that the people were surprised at the man’s healing because actually they had brought him for blessing, though since the account of Jesus blessing the children is the only example of the laying on of hands for blessing in the NT, Lane’s suggestion is doubtful.

⁶⁶ Sorensen, *Possession*, 137, suggests that the glance to heaven was possibly a sign of the source of his authority, and the sigh as the inspiration of that authority (as seen by the sign of the transfer of the Holy Spirit to the disciples by Jesus in John 20:22).

⁶⁷ Twelftree, *Exorcist*, 158, notes, “There is nothing to separate Jesus’ use of spittle from its use in the ancient world, or that he or the Gospel writers thought he was using it any differently from anyone else. So, in this aspect of his healing technique, the earliest Church was clearly not endeavoring to remove or isolate Jesus from his milieu.” Although it seems unlikely that Jesus was simply utilizing magical or pagan means for healing, cf. Mann, *Mark*, 323; Taylor, *Mark*, 354–5; Tipei, “Hands,” 145.

⁶⁸ France, *Mark*, 303, notes that physical contact was appropriate because a deaf man would not be able to hear healing words spoken by Jesus. Yet a simple touch would have accomplished the same effect. Besides, the spoken words seem inseparable from the physical touch.

to Jesus for healing through touch, and they were not disappointed; yet Jesus changed their requested laying on of hands into a complex healing ritual, possibly in order to break their preconceptions about the manner in which Jesus would and could heal. Healing came through touch as they requested, but in the process, Jesus creatively met the man at the point of his faith and cured him of his deficiencies.⁶⁹

On a second occasion people brought a blind man to Jesus, asking Jesus to touch him. (Mark 8:22–26).⁷⁰ Here too the healing involved a number of steps. First, Jesus took the man's hand and led him away from the village. Here the simple touching of the man's hand by Jesus was not for healing; rather it was to lead him out of the city, apparently to separate him from the press of townspeople.⁷¹ Then, Jesus applied saliva to the man's eyes and laid hands upon him. When queried, the man noted that he saw people "like trees walking."⁷² Jesus responded with a second the laying on of hands, this time explicitly "upon his eyes," thereby completely restoring the man's eyesight.

Several noteworthy elements invite discussion. To begin, Jesus responded to the request for touch with two separate laying on of hands,⁷³ demonstrating that touch and the laying on of hands seem to be interchangeable to Mark. Further, the text clearly states the second the laying on of hands was performed directly upon the man's eyes rather than on his head. As such, Jesus is not performing a ritual action but is using a dynamic method meant to restore the man's eyesight.⁷⁴ Thus, since the laying on of hands is mentioned three times—as a requested touch, after the spittle was applied, and directly performed upon the man's eyes—it appears to be the primary means of healing.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ As Tipei, "Hands," 145, notes, "The use of saliva has an added significance in that it carries the healing power from his well-functioning tongue to the man's bonded tongue to loosen the bond" (emphasis his) cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 383.

⁷⁰ Mark again assumes the laying on of hands is the usual healing procedure of Jesus.

⁷¹ The power of Jesus does not work indiscriminately: "Everything depends on the intentionality of the physical contact" (Kahl, *Miracle Stories*, 107).

⁷² Epidauros recounts the healing of Alceas by the god Asclepius: "This blind man saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god came up to him and with his fingers opened his eyes, and that he first saw the trees in the sanctuary. At daybreak he walked out sound" (Edelstein 423.A18). Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (2 vols.; Publications of the Institute of the History of Medicine: The Johns Hopkins University: Second Series: Text and Documents 2; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1945), 233; cf. Lynn R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation and Commentary* (SBLTT 36; Graeco-Roman Religion Series 11; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 99. The reference to Alceas first seeing the trees in the temple yard has been used to infer that Mark borrowed his story from that source. However, it is doubtful that there is a literary dependence here. More likely, details common to life will recur in material of similar genre. Most telling is that in Mark's story the man did not simply see trees first, but clearly had blurred vision, seeing men as if they were trees. Had Mark borrowed the story from Epidauros, most certainly he would not have changed the story so as to make Jesus have to touch the man twice, as opposed to Asclepius. Indeed, the very fact that the passage mentions that Jesus needed to touch the man twice—being the only occasion where he did so—should be taken as evidence of its originality, as certainly Mark would not have invented details as specific and unflattering as these (cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 370–2).

⁷³ This is the only instance where Jesus asked how the patient was doing and the only instance where he performed the laying on of hands twice.

⁷⁴ It is unclear why Jesus needed to perform such an elaborate healing procedure. Cole, *Mark*, 199–201, suggests the complex healing process was necessary to build the insufficient faith of the blind man. (cf. Lane, *Mark*, 285). However, on other occasions the faith of those who brought someone to Jesus was sufficient. In a different direction, Kertelge, *Wunder*, 163, suggests that perhaps the passage was constructed to demonstrate that Jesus opens the eyes of blinded humanity to the truths of the eschatological kingdom, there being hope yet for the disciples (as well as Mark's own community) to see the truth of the ministry of Jesus. Cf. Mann, *Mark*, 335–6; Guelich, *Mark*, 433–4; disputed by Taylor, *Mark*, 368–70.

⁷⁵ Guelich, *Mark*, 428–30.

Keir Howard suggests the spittle was utilized for cleansing dirt from the blind man's eyes, rather than functioning as a healing agent.⁷⁶ If so understood, Jesus saw that due to the man's blindness he had not taken care of his eyes, which were encrusted. Jesus spat into his eyes to soften the grime and then laid hands upon him that he might see. Afterward, the man is said to have "looked up" (*anablepsas*), a word commonly used for receiving one's sight (Matt 11:5; 20:34; Mark 10:51, 52; Luke 7:22; 18:41–43). Thus, the man likely received his sight at that moment, but because his eyes were still encrusted, he was not able to see clearly. Then Jesus laid his hands upon the man's eyes a second time in order to wipe away the remaining dirt so that in staring intently (*dieblepsen*), the man came to realize that he could see clearly (*eneblepen*).

John 9:1–12 relates a similar case of Jesus healing a blind man through the use of spittle.⁷⁷ In this story Jesus initiates the healing, making mud with his saliva, spreading it upon his eyes, and telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam. While the laying on of hands is not mentioned, a healing touch is implied when Jesus applied the mud to the man's eyes. Here, it is not clear what caused the healing: the spittle, the mud, the waters of Siloam, or the faith to do as instructed.

It seems John intends deeper spiritual significance as well. The story begins with a discussion by the disciples of whose sin caused the blind man's condition, and it concludes by the man washing his eyes in the pool of Siloam (which means "sent"). It seems the deeper meaning intended is such that to be cleansed and healed, the believer must be utterly obedient to the Lord, going where he is sent. Simon Kistemaker suggests, "The mud had nothing whatever to do with the physical cure; it had no medicinal qualities, not any more than did the waters of Jordan into which Elisha bade Naaman to plunge himself seven times (2 Kings 5:10) in order to be healed of his leprosy. In both cases the command was a test of obedience."⁷⁸ The implication in both stories is that obedience results in the washing of a patient who then is restored to wholeness; a parable about hope for the sinner who is washed by faith through complete obedience to the Lord. In each case, touch was involved in the healing method which resulted in the transfer of power for the cure of the patient.

The use of oil in healing was common in the ancient world (Isa 1:6; *ApMos* 9–13, *Gos. Nic.* 19; *Jos Ant.* 17.172; *Philo Somn.* 2.58; *Plato Menex.* 238; *Pliny Nat. Hist.* 23.39–40; *Seneca Ep.* 53.5; *Gos. Nic.* 19).⁷⁹ Nevertheless,

⁷⁶ Keir Howard, "Men as Trees Walking: Mark 8:22–26," *SJT* 37 (1984): 163–70.

⁷⁷ Rudolf Bultmann contends that there probably is no literary dependence of the Johannine account upon Mark's two accounts of the usage of spittle (*The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (trans. George Beasley-Murray, R. Hoare, and J. Riches; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964, 1971), 330).

⁷⁸ Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (2 vols.; NTC 1–2; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:75; cf. Borchert, *John*, 314. 2 Kgs 5:11 is the only passage in the OT (LXX) to mention the laying on of hands in the context of healing, and then only as a reference to what Naaman expected from Elisha. Siloam is the same pool used in the water ceremony of Tabernacles, the occasion for Jesus promising that rivers of living water would flow from the one believing in him (John 7:37–39). Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i–xii)* (AB 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 372–3 notes "Shiloh" was interpreted in a messianic sense in Jewish tradition.

⁷⁹ For additional examples see Peter Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 193; Luke Johnson, *The Letter of James* (AB 37A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1986), 331; Tipei, "Hands," 147–8; Schlier, *TDNT* 1:230–232. Especially noteworthy is the first century Jewish work, *Life of Adam and Eve*, which mentions an oil of life flowing from the tree of mercy that provides God's healing and mercy but will not be available until the end of time (*ApMos.* 9–13). The story was later retold in the fifth or sixth century *Gospel of Nicodemus*, but now the oil that raises the sick is available through the incarnation of the Son of God (*Gos. Nic.* 19).

as far as we know Jesus never utilized oil as a healing agent, though he was clearly aware of its medicinal usage (Luke 10:34). Instead Jesus directly healed the sick. The closest we find to the use of oil by Jesus is his use of saliva on three occasions discussed above (Mark 7:32–37; Mark 8:22–26; John 9:1–6).

On the other hand, Mark 6:13 relates that the Twelve “anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” The reference occurs in the commissioning and sending of the Twelve by pairs. First, Jesus gave the Twelve authority over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7), and when they returned Mark notes that they had healed many by anointing with oil (Mark 6:13). Why neither Matthew nor Luke included the anointing is puzzling. Matthew and Luke both mention that Jesus gave the disciples authority (power is added by Luke) to drive out demons and to cure diseases (Matt 10:1; Luke 9:1), though neither provides further detail relating to methodology. It is possible that they both assumed anointing was understood by their audience, and thereby did not think it necessary to detail it. It is also possible that they were not aware of any such practice at the time of their writing⁸⁰ and felt it would confuse their readers, though the reference in James makes the latter unlikely.⁸¹

Exactly why Mark is the only evangelist to include anointing with oil with the mention being causal as if understood by his readers, is a mystery that cannot be answered with certainty. Suffice it to say that in addition to Mark 6:13, James 5:14 also mentions anointing with oil, likely demonstrating that oil was one of the various healing techniques utilized by the different communities of faith in the first century. This would not be strange at all, seeing the wide variety of healing methodology that Jesus himself utilized in his ministry.⁸²

Concluding Thoughts

The gospel record portrays Jesus beginning his ministry as both a preacher of “good news” and a miracle-working healer. As a healer, the usual method Jesus used was personally to touch the patient, though often Jesus spoke a healing command or employed a combination of word and touch. On occasion, Jesus utilized additional healing agents such as saliva, mud, and washing in a pool. Over time, as faith grew in the power of Jesus to heal, people became impatient waiting to be touched, and instead moved to touch Jesus or his clothes, or even to trust in his healing authority at a distance. The variety of healing methods found in the ministry of Jesus demonstrates that he was not solely dependent upon any approach or ritual act, but upon the effective transference of healing power, most often through touch.

Terms for touching and the laying on of hands are used interchangeably for healing. When Jesus reached out his hand and laid it upon another for healing, that action could be referred to as the laying on of hands, even though the touch might not rise to the formality of an official ritual act. The variety of terms may represent an attempt by the evangelists to convey fully the breadth of healing methodologies utilized by Jesus. Equally possible is that due to the influence of the LXX, the laying on of hands was becoming known as the technical term for religious touch in the first century, and thus was sometimes used to describe a healing touch as well.

⁸⁰ Likewise, Luke makes no mention of the practice of anointing with oil in Acts.

⁸¹ That they both chose to follow Q instead is unlikely, as otherwise their accounts have little in common and thereby a Q origin is unlikely.

⁸² For further discussion, see Robinson, “Laying on of Hands,” 132–35.

The inconsistent usage of *epitithemi cheiras* for healing in the New Testament likely reveals the laying on of hands for healing was not understood as a formal ritual, but as an effective gesture. As such, the laying on of hands was used alongside other forms of touch, as well as healing words and authoritative commands. The Gospels portray Jesus as an effective healer, whose success came from the power he possessed rather than the methods he utilized. Acts portrays the disciples interested more in releasing the power they themselves had received from the Holy Spirit than in finding and using correct procedures—be it the laying on of hands, special healing words, or thaumaturgical actions. Consequently, the laying on of hands in the NT was not a ritual of hopeful petition for God’s intervention, but a gesture of purposeful release of divine power—and in the case of the disciples, through the power of the Spirit in the authority granted by the name of Jesus. With that in mind, the believer today is justified in first contending for a release of the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit within his or her own life, and then to move out with faith and authority to release a healing word, touch or both, to those in need, thus carrying on the ministry of Jesus within the present age.

Mental Health and the Church: A Character Study

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the current mental health epidemic and highlights examples of mental health disorders in the Bible, as well as providing and analyzing various responses of the Church to the current mental health crisis. Contention is made by the author that mental illness is not limited to the modern age and seeks to elucidate for the reader how mental health challenges are not new.

The Mental Health Epidemic

On August 12, 2018, Andrew Stoecklein returned to the pulpit after a four-month sabbatical. He preached that morning on depression and suicide, citing the story of Elijah. Stoecklein candidly spoke of his own struggle with anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts. “‘You see mental illness on display,’ Stoecklein said. ‘Now that is something that we don’t like to talk about much, do we? Especially not in the church.’” He expressed that there is hope and help available for those who suffer from mental illness. Twelve days later, Stoecklein died of depression.² Common vernacular would say ‘he killed himself,’ or ‘he committed suicide.’ However, this wording implies that Stoecklein made a rational choice to die. “Suicide is what the death certificate says when one dies of depression. Peter D. Kramer, MD”³ In the wake of his passing, Stoecklein’s wife, Kayla, bravely blogged her journey of grief.⁴ While she has received many messages of support for her candor and openness, the sad reality is that there continues to be a negative stigma and criticism of those who struggle with mental illness.

Our world today faces a challenge of epidemic proportions. Mental health diagnoses are on the rise. Six percent of the world population suffers from some form of mental illness. The Church is ill-equipped to handle this crisis and often ostracizes those who suffer from mental health disorders.⁵ The Bible exhibits numerous examples where God uses broken people to advance His Kingdom yet the Church of today often stands in judgment of those who do not fit a certain mold. “Mental illnesses are real disorders that have their origins in faulty biological processes. The Bible even supports this by listing madness along with physical problems like boils, tumors, scabs, and blindness (Deuteronomy 28:27-28).”⁶ Church leaders must open dialogue and create a place of healing to address mental illness in our communities.

This article will take an introductory look at this mental health epidemic, examples of mental health disorders in the Bible, and discuss the responses of the Church. The author speculates that mental illness is not limited to the

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² “A young pastor preached about depression, then killed himself. His widow wants to help others by talking about it,” Los Angeles Times Article accessed December 27, 2018, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-pastor-suicide-20181223-story.html?fbclid=IwAR24VSvA79lOqwPyMvELy3S85s9EXybnuZDXc4-nUpO5G4ZCAycFxJN3H1U>

³ Matthew S. Stanford *Grace for the Afflicted: A Clinical and Biblical Perspective on Mental Health Issues* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2017) iBooks, Chapter 14.

⁴ Los Angeles Times Article accessed December 27, 2018.

⁵ Matthew S. Stanford, “Is Mental Health the Great Mission Opportunity for the 21st Century Church?”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 29, 2017).

⁶ Stanford, iBooks Chapter 4.

modern age. The intent is to enhance understanding of mental illness, generate compassion for those who suffer from these disorders, and see these children of God through His eyes. Ecclesiastes 1:9 states, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun.” Mental health challenges are not new. They are no doubt resultant of The Fall and will be with us until the Age to Come.

There appears to be present within the American Church a general sentiment, namely, “[t]here is a false teaching that says an authentic Christian can never be depressed, can never have troubles.”⁷ Pastors enhance this stigma by not discussing mental health issues at all. “In almost every single church, someone says, ‘You cannot be a strong Christian and struggle with mental health.’”⁸ According to Jeremiah Johnston of the Christian Thinkers Society, “66% of pastors never talk about mental health because they are barely holding it together themselves.”⁹ This is in part due to feelings of guilt and shame. This hinders people from seeking help. “Guilt and shame too often send us into hiding. If we have to hide, we cannot get help for our needs and brokenness; we cannot become “poor in Spirit,” and therefore be blessed.”¹⁰ Instead of being a beacon of hope to hurting people, the Church is often a stumbling block to hurting people.

God intended for the Church to be a place of healing. Believers are to bear one another’s burdens (Gal. 6:2), not to judge others (Matt. 7:1). In fact, judgment inhibits relationship. Paul compares the Church to a body:

On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. *If one member suffers, all suffer together*; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor. 12:22-26, emphasis added)

There is a part of the Body of Christ that is suffering. “Any living organism functions properly only when its parts are in intimate and harmonious relationship with each other and with the total organism.”¹¹ The Church has a responsibility to change the way it responds to the suffering members of its body.

Paul writes to Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Since this is the case, it stands to reason that the Bible speaks to issues of mental health, that there are God-breathed examples and lessons from which to learn. The author proposes that Elijah suffered from depression, David could have been bipolar, and Paul struggled with Narcissism. God uses broken people; of this we can be sure.

⁷ Jeremiah Johnston “Lasting Truth for Unanswered Questions”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 29, 2017).

⁸ Jeremiah Johnson, “The Invisible Challenge: Church of the Invisible Disease”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 30, 2017).

⁹ Jeremiah Johnston, September 29, 2017.

¹⁰ Henry Cloud *Changes That Heal: How to Understand Your Past to Ensure a Healthier Future* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) iBooks, Chapter 1.

¹¹ Lawrence O. Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke, *Church Leadership: Following the Example of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 93.

The aforementioned ‘pillars’ of Christianity demonstrate that those afflicted with mental illness are not limited or defined by their disorder. The Church can, in point of fact, learn from how these individuals handled their weaknesses.

Diagnostic criteria for each of these presuppositions comes from *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition (DSM-5)*, produced by the American Psychiatric Association. One difficulty in diagnosing any mental illness is that there are a range of symptoms which can present differently for each person. Additionally, there are variations in the severity of the illness. A clinical diagnosis is determined only after detailed analysis and observation. “The case formulation for any given patient must involve careful clinical history and concise summary of the social, psychological, and biological factors that may have contributed to developing a given mental disorder.”¹² Clearly, sources for diagnostic purposes are limited. For the sake of this paper, analytical criteria for a diagnosis will be limited to Scriptural texts.

Elijah as an Example of Major Depressive Disorder

Depression and suicide are not new to the twenty-first century. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), however, suicide is on the rise and is the tenth leading cause of death.¹³ The popularity of the hit musical *Dear Evan Hansen* highlights the widespread impact. “The show’s music . . . combined with a sensitively handled storyline about how mental illness affects teens and their families in a world made more complicated by social media, gives the production unique resonance at this moment.”¹⁴ Winner of six Tony Awards, including Best Musical, *Dear Evan Hansen* brings to light a growing awareness of mental health issues and a growing need for quality care.

In a letter that gets mistaken for a suicide note of a classmate, Evan Hansen writes, “I wish I was part of something. I wish that anything I said mattered to anyone. I mean face it, would anyone notice if I just disappeared tomorrow?”¹⁵ These raw and heartfelt words resonate with millions who suffer from depression. According to Henry Cloud, “Depressed people look hopeless: their eyes don’t sparkle, their shoulders slump, their faces are drawn and tired. They long for something they are not getting.”¹⁶ The story of Evan Hansen is their story. They wonder if their life has any purpose. They are searching for some form of connection. Songs such as “You Will Be Found” resonate with people looking for hope. Consider its lyrics:

Even when the dark comes crashing through
When you need a friend to carry you
And when you’re broken on the ground
You will be found
So let the sun come streaming in

¹² *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* (Arlington: American Psychiatric Association, 2013), 19.

¹³ “Suicide Rates Rising Across the U.S.” Center for Disease Control Article accessed on January 9, 2019, <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2018/p0607-suicide-prevention.html>

¹⁴ “‘There Are a Lot of People in Distress.’ *Dear Evan Hansen* Creators and Experts on a Youth Mental Health Crisis” TIME Article accessed January 12, 2019, <http://time.com/5272063/dear-evan-hansen-mental-health-roundtable/>

¹⁵ “Evan Hansen’s Letter” Pinterest Image accessed January 12, 2019, <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/5a/6f/ba/5a6fba595908b17b99c1f0a88b594766.jpg>

¹⁶ Cloud, Chapter 4.

‘Cause you’ll reach up and you’ll rise again
Lift your head and look around
You will be found¹⁷

These lyrics speak to a desire to be seen, to be heard. They echo the cry of those stumbling alone in the dark and searching for meaning.

According to *DSM-5*, there are nine symptoms of which five or more must be present in order to qualify as clinical depression, or Major Depressive Disorder. Briefly stated, these symptoms are: (1) Depressed mood, (2) Diminished pleasure in activities, (3) Weight changes not due to dieting, (4) Insomnia or hypersomnia, (5) Psychomotor agitation or retardation, (6) Fatigue or loss of energy, (7) Feelings of worthlessness or excessive guilt, (8) Diminished concentration, (9) Suicidal ideation or attempt. Criteria causes significant social or occupational impairment.¹⁸ “Loss of interest or pleasure is nearly always present, at least to some degree.”¹⁹ Those who suffer from depression live under a constant cloud of overwhelming sadness, where even the smallest task can feel overwhelming.

Periods of sadness are common to the human experience. Life in the wake of the Fall is difficult and fraught with hardship. God says to Adam in Genesis, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.” (Gen. 3:17b) This reality of The Fall is not the same as clinical depression. Individuals who suffer from clinical depression are unable to function normally. “Many functional consequences of major depressive disorder derive from individual symptoms . . . Impairment may, however, range to complete incapacity such that the depressed individual is unable to attend basic self-care needs or is mute or catatonic.”²⁰ Suicidal ideation is common and “The possibility of suicidal behavior exists at all times during major depressive episodes.”²¹

In the Bible, the story of Elijah provides an example of an individual who suffered from depression and how God met his needs in the midst of the darkness. David wrote in Psalm 23, “*Even though* I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and staff, they comfort me” (emphasis added). David assumed he would walk through the valley, but he knew that God would assuredly go with him. Elijah learned the truth of this in his own journey.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, “So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow.” Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.

But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness and came and sat down under a broom tree. And he asked that he might die, saying, “It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” And he lay down and slept under a broom tree. And behold, an angel touched him and said to him, “Arise and eat.” And he looked, and behold, there was at his head a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water. And he ate and drank and lay down again. And the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, “Arise and eat, for the journey is too great

¹⁷ Benj Pasek and Justin Paul, “You Will Be Found”, *Dear Evan Hansen*, Kobalt Music Publishing, 2017.

¹⁸ *DSM-5*, 160.

¹⁹ *DSM-5*, 163.

²⁰ *DSM-5*, 167.

²¹ *DSM-5*, 167.

for you.” And he arose and ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mount of God (1 Kings 19:1-8).

Just prior to this journey, Elijah had a great victory. He defeated the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. In the wake of this victory, he spiraled into suicidal depression. He expresses his desire to die. (vs. 4) The following table shows Scriptural evidence Elijah meets six of the nine criteria for Major Depressive Disorder.

DSM-5 Criteria for Major Depressive Disorder	Scripture Reference
1) Depressed Mood	1 Kings 19:3-4
2) Diminished Pleasure in Activities	
3) Weight Changes	1 Kings 19:5; 1 Kings 19:7
4) Insomnia or Hypersomnia	1 Kings 19:5
5) Psychomotor Agitation or Retardation	
6) Fatigue or Loss of Energy	1 Kings 19:4
7) Feelings of Worthlessness/Excessive Guilt	1 Kings 19:4
8) Diminished Concentration	
9) Suicidal Ideation	1 Kings 19:4

Elijah sent his servant away and isolated himself in the desert, showing the first symptoms of his depression. Those who suffer from depression tend to send people away.²² Elijah then cried out in despair. He complained that his life was meaningless. He declared, “I am no better than my fathers.” (vs. 4) In the wake of a great failure, one could expect such a statement. This followed what would appear to be a great victory, however.

Prior to this, the Lord proved His sovereignty at Mount Carmel and Elijah slaughtered every one of the prophets of Baal. Yet Elijah had a different outcome in mind. He desired to see the people repent and return to the Lord. When that did not happen, he took it personally. Isolated and alone, “Elijah came to feel that his life was fruitless, that he had failed in his mission.”²³ He fell into despair, assuming responsibility for something out of his control. “The sense of worthlessness or guilt associated with a major depressive episode may include unrealistic negative evaluations of one’s worth or guilty preoccupations or ruminations over minor past failing . . . The sense of worthlessness or guilt may be of delusional proportions.”²⁴ For Elijah to perceive a lack of repentance as a personal failure shows that his

²² Richard Blackaby “Preparing People for a Divine Encounter”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 30, 2017).

²³ James E. Smith, *Old Testament Survey Series: The Books of History* (Joplin: College Press Publishing Company, 1995) Logos Version, 1 Kings 19:1–4.

²⁴ *DSM-5*, 164.

mind was not in the right place in that moment. He is not personally responsible for the choices of others.

After isolating himself, Elijah sat down, tired and worn out. He was wearied of life. “Some depressed individuals report having to force themselves to eat.”²⁵ In Elijah’s story, the angel of the Lord came and reminded Elijah to eat. In between reminders to eat, Elijah slept. “Decreased energy, tiredness, and fatigue are common.”²⁶ He was unable to function or take care of himself. “The episodes must be accompanied by clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.”²⁷ Depressed, worn and weary, Elijah was in need of rest.

Elijah’s words show the suicidal depths of his depression. “It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life” (1 Kings 19:4). Had he truly wanted for his life to end, he could have remained to let Jezebel kill him.²⁸ Instead, he knew where to go for comfort. He cried out to God and God answered him. He did not condemn, He simply asked a question, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kings. 19:9) It is at this time that God revealed Himself to Elijah. God did not come in a loud, booming voice, He came in a still, small whisper.

Through the Horeb signs God taught Elijah an important lesson. The spectacular and dramatic have their place in God’s order of things. Most often, however, the divine program is carried forward through the still small voice which speaks to the hearts of people. While Yahweh is a God of judgment, he is also the God of mercy and grace. Elijah needed to be reminded of that fact. He needed to see that the time of fire, sword and slaughter had passed. Now the time had come to proclaim the word of Yahweh in gentle silence. The still small voice of protest would become in the course of time a powerful force; it must not be allowed to die! A successor must be chosen to carry on the work.²⁹

Here we see that in the depths of his hopelessness, God provided exactly what Elijah needed.

After this encounter, He did not leave Elijah alone. Elisha became Elijah’s attendant and, in what must be a divine directive, remained with Elijah until God took him to heaven. Three times in 2 Kings 2, Elisha declared, “As surely as the Lord lives and as you live, I will not leave you.” Never again in Elijah’s story is there a complaint or desire to quit. Elijah’s encounter with God prepared him for a lifetime of following the LORD. His greatest days lay before him.³⁰

Based on the criteria set forth in *DSM-5*, Elijah shows clear signs of Major Depressive Disorder. Isolation, excessive guilt, fatigue, hypersomnia, not eating, and suicidal ideation are all symptoms Elijah exhibited. In his time of despair, he cried out to the One whom he knew could help him and God did not leave him alone. He sent an angel to attend to Elijah’s physical needs. Then, when Elijah was ready, God spoke to him in a whisper that touched the depths of his soul. God sent him a companion who remained steadfast throughout the rest of his ministry. Elijah went

²⁵ *DSM-5*, 163.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Blackaby, September 30, 2017.

²⁹ Smith, 1 Kings 19:11–12.

³⁰ Blackaby, September 30, 2017.

forth comforted and with the resilience he needed for the task ahead.

David as an Example of Bipolar II Disorder

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, an estimated 2.8% of the population suffers from Bipolar Disorder.³¹ Like Major Depressive Disorder, this disorder is gaining recognition in popular media. “Compelling storylines for main television characters with bipolar disorder continue to gain popularity on the small screen, helping to reduce stigma and normalize mental illness.”³² These characters accurately depict the intense, emotional mood swings, of this disorder. As with depression, this represents a growing cultural awareness of the complexities of mental illness and a need for the Church to embrace and engage the conversation.

According to *DSM-5*, there are myriad personality disorders, of which bipolar is one. Bipolar II Disorder includes both hypomanic episodes and major depressive episodes. It differs from Bipolar I Disorder in that the symptoms of depression are more pronounced, the hypomanic episode is shorter in duration, and the hypomanic episode does not impede functioning. The hypomanic episode is a period of at least four days in which an individual presents symptoms of elevated irritable mood and increased energy. The diagnosis requires a minimum of three of the following seven criterium: (1) inflated self-esteem, (2) decreased need for sleep, (3) more talkative than normal, (4) racing thoughts, (5) distractibility, (6) goal-directed activity, and (7) high risk activities. Additionally, the hypomanic episode constitutes an abnormal change in behavior that is observable by others but is not severe enough as to impede social or occupational functioning.³³ The criteria for the major depressive episode is the same as previously discussed in reference to Elijah.

Individuals with bipolar II disorder typically present to a clinician during a major depressive episode and are unlikely to complain initially of hypomania. Typically, the hypomanic episodes themselves do not cause impairment. Instead, the impairment results from the major depressive episodes or from a persistent pattern of unpredictable mood changes and fluctuating, unreliable interpersonal or occupational functioning. Individuals with bipolar II disorder may not view the hypomanic episodes as pathological or disadvantageous, although others may be troubled by the individual’s erratic behavior.³⁴

While the initial presenting symptom is that of depression, it is the hypomanic episode which determines a diagnosis of bipolar disorder.

Suggesting that David had Bipolar II Disorder is unconventional. Yet there is evidence for this diagnosis. Many scholars suggest that David suffered from Major Depressive Disorder. “A number of individuals in the

³¹ “Bipolar Disorder” National Institute of Mental Health Article accessed on January 14, 2019 <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/bipolar-disorder.shtml>

³² “6 TV Show Characters with Bipolar Disorder” bphope Article accessed on January 14, 2019, <http://www.bphope.com/bipolar-buzz/6-tv-shows-featuring-characters-with-bipolar-disorder/>

³³ *DSM-5*, 132—33.

³⁴ *DSM-5*, 135.

Scriptures are reported to have experienced periods of profound sadness and grief that might be considered depression, but none were better documented than Israel's greatest king, David."³⁵ Do to the prevalence of information to support depression, this paper will focus on the symptoms of a hypomanic episode.

Why take the unorthodox approach to say that David was bipolar when the case for depression is more sure? If the goal is to reduce a negative stigma surrounding people with Bipolar Disorder, then proposing that a beloved biblical character suffered from Bipolar Disorder provides an example of how God uses those with mental illness for His glory. One can begin to see the positive attributes of this mental health disorder and the incredible ways which God uses the weaknesses of an individual surrendered to Him.

One blogger shared the comfort she finds in considering the possibility that David was bipolar. As someone diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder, she shares how she relates to the whiplash nature of many of the psalms of David.

I was reading a Psalm and it struck me. Black and white, literally. This guy's emotions are all over the place. Verse to verse—it changes constantly, many times within the same Psalm.

I'm not trying to be silly or anything. I actually took, and still take, great comfort in that idea. I've heard so many sermons in my life about David's sins, and how God still considered him a man after His own heart, but I've never heard one about David's mental stability. I rather like my perspective. It makes the Bible even more relateable [SIC] to me. We just don't hear enough about mental issues in the church. It's a shame. A lot of us deal with those issues. And frankly, a lot more need to. Three cheers for counseling, and sometimes medication.³⁶

The need for connection comes across in her heartfelt post. Those who suffer from Bipolar Disorder are looking for unconditional love and acceptance. "The church allows people to suffer because we don't understand what they need and how to help them."³⁷ One means of helping is to provide examples that serve to diminish the negative stigma surrounding Bipolar Disorder. The story of David can do this.

The story of David begins in 1 Samuel 16 when Samuel anoints David as the next king of Israel, and it continues until the first chapter of 1 Kings. David is credited with nearly half of the Psalms. Additionally, the whiplash nature of many of the Psalms of David suggest distractibility. These texts provide a wealth of information for diagnostic criteria. The following chart details specific references for the necessary three of seven criteria.

³⁵ Stanford, I Books Chapter 7.

³⁶ "King David Was Bipolar" Mental Post-It's Blog Post accessed on January 14, 2019, <https://kristiporter.me/2012/04/21/king-david-was-bipolar/>

³⁷ Amy Simpson *Troubled Minds: Mental Illness and the Church's Mission* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 20013), 19.

DSM-5 Criteria for Bipolar Hypomanic Episode	Scripture Reference
1) Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity	1 Samuel 17; 2 Samuel 24
2) Decreased need for sleep	
3) More talkative; pressure to keep talking	
4) Flight of ideas; racing thoughts	
5) Distractibility	
6) Increase in goal-directed activity / psychomotor agitation	1 Samuel 25
7) High risk activities	1 Samuel 27; 2 Samuel 5:13; 2 Samuel 11

The first external observation of Bipolar II Disorder criteria is the story of David and Goliath. When David arrives in the encampment to see the Israelites cowering in fear of Goliath, he cannot stay silent. Eliab, David's eldest brother, rebukes David for speaking out to the soldiers about Goliath.

And David said to the men who stood by him, "What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" And the people answered him in the same way, "So shall it be done to the man who kills him." Now Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spoke to the men. And Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, "Why have you come down? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your presumption and the evil of your heart, for you have come down to see the battle" (1 Sam. 17:26-28).

From an outside perspective, David's comments come across as grandiose. David's older brother "is annoyed with the conduct of his youngest brother at this crucial time. David seemed to him to be just a show-off."³⁸ The story of David and Goliath is one of God's triumph. It reminds the Israelites of God's sovereignty. However, to the outside observer, David's claims and subsequent defeat of Goliath can be perceived as a manic episode. It takes tremendous gumption to face a giant. Even the best soldiers of Israel did not want to fight Goliath. They were shaking in their boots. David came along, the runt of the family, a shepherd not a soldier, and took on Goliath. He not only faced the giant, he won. He put his faith in God to accomplish this great task, but he also had the self-grandiosity to believe it could be done.

Another example of grandiosity occurs later in the life of David when he orders a census of the people of Israel as detailed in 2 Samuel 24. Joab knew that conducting the census was wrong and pleaded with David to not do the census. "David apparently showed lack of trust in the Lord to supply the necessary men when needed, and *wrongful pride* in the hundreds of thousands of forces at his command"³⁹ (emphasis added). David later recognizes the sin of his action and repents, but not without consequence to the people of Israel. "So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel

³⁸ "Notes on 1 Samuel 17" *The ESV Study Bible*, ed. by Lane T. Dennis and others (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008) iBooks.

³⁹ "Notes on 2 Samuel 24" *The ESV Study Bible*, ed. by Lane T. Dennis and others (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008) iBooks.

from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men” (2 Sam. 24:15).

Examples of involvement in high risk activities abound in the story of David. The story of David and Achish in 1 Samuel 27 is one example. David brings 600 men with him as he flees Saul to the land of the Philistines, becoming enemies of his own people. Sexual indiscretion is another example of high-risk activities in David’s life. David collected wives and concubines during his reign. “And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron, and more sons and daughters were born to David” (2 Sam. 5:13) These activities have the potential for painful consequences, as seen in the story of David and Bathsheba.

The first sign of something amiss is in 1 Samuel 11:1 “In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel... But David remained at Jerusalem.” Instead of going to war with his men, David remained home. The text does not give a reason as to why David remained behind, however, it “hints that something is wrong: the kings go out to battle, but this king does not.”⁴⁰

While remaining behind in Jerusalem, David had an affair with the wife of a faithful soldier. “It happened, late one afternoon... he saw from the roof a woman bathing . . . So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her.” (2 Sam. 11:2-4) David showed no sign of stopping and thinking about his actions. He showed poor judgment and a lack of restraint. “A common feature of bipolar II disorder is impulsivity.”⁴¹ David’s irrational behavior does not stop at the affair.

Bathsheba became pregnant and David tried to cover the affair by bringing her husband, Uriah, home. When Uriah refused to go home and spend the night with his wife, David sent him back to the battle with a letter of instructions, in which he wrote, “Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die.” (2 Sam 11:15) With Uriah out of the way, David took Bathsheba as his wife.

David broke three of the Ten Commandments: coveting, adultery, and murder, “while the Lord silently watched his behavior. Here at last the Lord calls him to account for standing above the law.”⁴² The prophet Nathan visited David, confronting him of his sin. David showed genuine repentance, however the consequences remained. “And Nathan said to David, ‘The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child who is born to you shall die.’” (2 Sam. 12:13-14) David pleaded with God to spare his child, but the child died.

David provides an example of human frailty combined with great faith and perseverance. No matter how far he turned from God, he readily confessed and repented when confronted with his actions. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). David understood that without God, he was nothing. God used his journey of mental illness to provide comfort to generations. “There may be heightened levels of creativity in some individuals with a bipolar disorder.”⁴³ David showed this creativity in his

⁴⁰ “Notes on 2 Samuel 11:1” *The ESV Study Bible*, ed. by Lane T. Dennis and others (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008) iBooks.

⁴¹ *DSM-5*, 136.

⁴² “Notes on 2 Samuel 12” *The ESV Study Bible*, ed. by Lane T. Dennis and others (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008) iBooks.

⁴³ *DSM-5*, 135.

writings and worship. His bipolar nature of many of the psalms he wrote provide comfort for those with rapidly shifting emotions and thoughts.

While an unconventional approach, a case can be made that David suffered from Bipolar II Disorder. Scholars have extensively documented his depressive episodes. He showed symptoms of hypomanic episodes in his encounter with Goliath, taking the census of Israel, his affair with Bathsheba, and the many wives and concubines he collected. His writings exhibit whiplash changes in emotions and thought with which others with Bipolar II Disorder can relate. In viewing David through the lens of Bipolar II Disorder, those impacted by this mental illness have a hope that God can use anyone in spite of and because of their weaknesses. It helps to diminish the negative stigma surrounding all Personality Disorders, providing an example of a heart continually seeking God's best.

Paul as an Example of Narcissism

Narcissism is characterized by selfishness. One does not have to look far to see evidence of it within modern culture. The "Selfie" culture is just one example of this. Used improperly, Social Media can promote and enhance narcissistic traits. It is not uncommon to suggest that politicians, executives, or those with a "Type A" personality might be narcissistic because of their personality traits. "Only when these traits are inflexible, maladaptive, and persisting and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute narcissistic personality disorder."⁴⁴ Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) involves more than selfishness or a desire to trend on Social Media. "Narcissistic personality disorder is a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy."⁴⁵ However, anyone who struggles with selfish tendencies or narcissistic traits can learn from Paul's example.

The *DSM-5* details nine traits of narcissistic personality disorder of which five must be evident for diagnosis. These traits begin presenting in early adulthood in various contexts. These traits are: (1) grandiose sense of self-importance, (2) fantasies of power, success, and brilliance, (3) believes that he/she is special/unique, (4) requires excessive admiration, (5) has a sense of entitlement, (6) is interpersonally exploitative, (7) lacks empathy, (8) is envious/believes others envy them, (9) shows arrogant, naughty behaviors or attitude.⁴⁶

In order to determine if Paul had narcissistic personality disorder, one can read through Luke's analysis of Paul in the book of Acts and look at the writings of Paul himself. The following chart details possible traits of Narcissism which Paul exhibited.

⁴⁴ *DSM-5*, 672.

⁴⁵ *DSM-5*, 645.

⁴⁶ *DSM-5*, 669–70.

DSM-5 Criteria for Narcissism	Scripture Reference
1) Grandiose sense of self	Rom. 6:19; 1 Cor. 9:1; 2 Cor. 11:5
2) Fantasies of power, success, brilliance...	
3) Believes that he/she is 'special' and unique	Phil. 3:4-6
4) Requires excessive admiration	
5) Has a sense of entitlement	Gal. 2:11-14
6) Is interpersonally exploitative	Acts 13:13; Acts 15:36-41
7) Lacks empathy	Acts 7:58; Acts 8:1
8) is envious/believes others envy them	
9) Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitude	

The first trait of narcissistic personality disorder is that of a grandiose sense of self. “Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder believe that they are superior, special, or unique and expect others to recognize them as such.”⁴⁷ Paul’s writings hint at this perspective. For example, in Romans 6:19, Paul writes, “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations.” Though not outright grandiose, it might suggest that Paul believes he has a superior intellect. Additionally, Paul expressed certainty of his position in the early Church.

Paul’s writings demonstrate that he exhibited a high level of self-confidence. For example, he declares himself an “apostle” on par with Jesus’ first disciples (2 Cor 11:5). His concept of “apostleship” grows out of his conviction that the risen Christ had called him to a particular mission (1 Cor 9:1). From this calling, he is willing to exert his leadership over other church leaders (Phlm 1:17–21), take bold positions (Rom 15:15), and rebuke them when necessary (Gal 2:11–14). Paul’s zeal for Judaism and his sense of self-purpose apparently continued (although transformed in direction) throughout his life in Christ.⁴⁸

Paul’s view of himself as an apostle with the first disciples is later authenticated by early Christians in the canonization process of the New Testament.⁴⁹

Secondly, Paul describes his unique Jewish pedigree in Philippians 3:4- 6:

... though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁴⁷ DSM-5, 670.

⁴⁸ John D. Barry, ed., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), Logos Version, Paul.

⁴⁹ John Huntzinger, “New Testament I”. The King’s University Lecture. (lecture presented at The King’s University, Van Nuys, CA, January 17, 2011), The King’s University, Van Nuys, CA.

If one speculates that this represents a narcissistic trait, the verses which follow show the degree to which Paul's encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road changed him. "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). He sees his pedigree as worthless. "Paul's accounting, however, has now changed completely: what formerly went into the gain column—his power, prestige, and 'obedience'—now goes into the loss column."⁵⁰ Paul learned to place his worth in Jesus. He transformed from a man who held himself above others to a man who knew the reality of his broken state.

Perhaps a bit less clear cut is the suggestion that Paul had a sense of entitlement. In Galatians 2:11-14, Paul confronts Peter in Antioch. "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned." (Gal. 2:11) Are these the words of someone who feels entitled to authority in the Church? Entitlement includes "unreasonable expectations of... automatic compliance with his or her expectation(s)."⁵¹ Paul certainly expects a response, but he also has the weight of truth in calling out Peter. As a stand-alone criterion, this alone is not sufficient. When taken into consideration with other traits, however, it is not a far stretch to see Paul acting on a sense of entitlement.

A fourth characteristic of Narcissism is exploitation. The rift between Paul and John Mark provides a means of questioning whether or not Paul had this characteristic. Luke gives no reasoning in the book of Acts as to why John Mark left Paul and Barnabas to return to Jerusalem. One can speculate reasons. Did John Mark fall out of favor with Paul? Perhaps. Luke later showed the continuation of this rift.

And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, "Let us return and visit the brothers in every city where we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are." Now Barnabas wanted to take with them John called Mark. But Paul thought best not to take with them one who had withdrawn from them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. And there arose a sharp disagreement, so that they separated from each other. Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus, but Paul chose Silas and departed, having been commended by the brothers to the grace of the Lord (Acts 15:36-40).

Did Paul respond out of personal vulnerability? Perhaps Paul felt betrayed by Barnabas' desire to include John Mark in the mission trip. "Individuals with this disorder generally require excessive admiration. Their self-esteem is almost invariably very fragile."⁵² It is possible that the breakdown of relationship happened due to exploitative characteristics of Narcissism.

The final characteristic Paul exhibits of narcissistic personality disorder is that of a lack of empathy. "Individuals with narcissistic personality disorder generally have a lack of empathy and have difficulty recognizing the desires, subjective experiences, and feelings of others."⁵³ Prior to his Damascus Road experience, Paul, then known as Saul, was a fervent persecutor of the followers of Jesus. "Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And

⁵⁰ "Notes on Philippians 3:7" *The ESV Study Bible*, ed. by Lane T. Dennis and others (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2008) iBooks.

⁵¹ *DSM-5*, 669.

⁵² *DSM-5*, 670.

⁵³ *DSM-5*, 670.

the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul . . . And Saul approved of his execution (Acts 7:58, 8:1). Saul stands by as the enraged crowd stoned Stephen. Not only that, but he approved of the act of violence.

What stands out about the life of Paul is not the question of whether or not he was a narcissist. What his life exemplifies is transformation. In Romans, he penned the formula for transformation that is only now being confirmed by scientific discovery. “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom. 12:2) Current studies of the brain reveal neuroplasticity of the brain. The physical structure of the brain changes moment by moment. God designed humanity with the ability to change through transformation. The neuroplasticity of the brain allows for the return of function and allows the brain to create new pathways.⁵⁴

Paul also recognizes the imperfect way in which he conforms to the mind of Christ. “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:19). His example provides hope that anyone can change. When Jesus met Paul on the road to Damascus, Paul’s life was dramatically altered. He had an experience that changed him to his very core. In the wake of that transformation, he still struggled with his sin nature. He expounded upon ways to continually seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit for aid in times of weakness. He constantly persisted in becoming Christ like. That is an example anyone can follow.

The case for Paul having Narcissism finds evidence in Paul’s lack of empathy during the stoning of Stephen, the rift in his relationship with John Mark and Barnabas, his grandiose sense of self, sense of entitlement, and his detailed explanation of his pedigree. Individually, each of these criteria do not make much of an impact, but collectively they present a pattern of behavior and thinking that suggest that Paul struggled with his inner self. He confirmed this inner struggle in his writings, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to is what I keep on doing.” (Rom. 7:19) Yet Paul does not remain in this state. His encounter with Jesus changed him and he made the daily choice to take the difficult road of following Jesus.

The Church and Mental Health

God’s response to human frailty and weakness gives hope to a hurting world. Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:3) Psychiatric illness is the number two cause of the disability in the United States, second only to chronic pain.⁵⁵ Yet the Church regularly fails to offer support, encouragement, and hope to many who suffer from mental health issues.

Rather than offering hope, Christians often propose various reasons why people have mental illness, such as not exercising enough faith, having unconfessed sin, demon possession, etc.⁵⁶ While there are cases where these suggestions hold true, this is not the entirety of the issue and does not apply to every case. There are biological factors

⁵⁴ Caroline Leaf, “The Mind and Mental Health”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 29, 2017).

⁵⁵ Michael Lyles, “Love Your Brain as Yourself”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 28, 2017).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

to take into consideration. Patients with psychiatric illness deserve the same level of care as anyone with cancer or any other illness.⁵⁷ However, more often, Christians treat those with mental illness as a pariah.

As the negative stigma surrounding mental health issues continues to break down, more people who suffer will step forward and open up about their experiences. The Church must not be the ones who bring condemnation and judgment.

Our society is growing dramatically in its acceptance of mental illness and its openness to discuss mental health publicly . . . Should the church be the last holdout in this movement forward toward grace? Should we be the ones clinging to the old, fear-based beliefs that keep us convinced that people with mental illness should be isolated, shamed and silent - that their burdens are too great for the church to bear, their diagnoses too dire for the hope of Christ?⁵⁸

The biblical examples of Elijah, David, and Paul show that God uses broken people.

Statistically, individuals experiencing psychological distress are more likely to go to clergy than any other professional group. Yet churches are ill-equipped to handle these cries for help. Most churches do not know what to do, so they give a momentary prayer. They often over-spiritualize the problem, and simply offer platitudes.⁵⁹

Even as we're enthusiastically delivering meals to people suffering physically, we are largely ignoring the afflictions of a quarter of our adult population who are suffering mentally. That's about equal to the total percentage of people diagnosed with cancer each year, those living with heart disease, people infected with HIV and AIDS, and those afflicted with diabetes – combined!⁶⁰ [From Foreword by Marshall Shelley]

If the Church wants to remain relevant and be a place of healing in the twenty-first century, then the Church must embrace a philosophy of ministering to those suffering from mental health issues.

There are no easy answers, but it must start with awareness. Pastors need to speak up about mental illness. They can do this by sharing their own stories of struggle or doing character studies on Biblical figures such as Elijah, David, and Paul who struggle with mental illness. Churches can maintain a database of local mental health professionals and provide it to those in need. Consider starting a mental health ministry or partnering with existing ministries. Provide the same resources that those who are grieving or going through traumatic illness receive such as meals, prayer, and other forms of support. And finally, be patient. Mental illness is chronic. “You may have to help again and again and again. That is the nature of many forms of mental illness.”⁶¹ Those who suffer from mental illness can learn strategies and coping mechanisms. They can transform their minds, but there is no cure for many of these

⁵⁷ Michael Lyles, “Love Your Brain as Yourself”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 28, 2017).

⁵⁸ Simpson, 19.

⁵⁹ Stanford, September 29, 2017.

⁶⁰ Simpson, 11.

⁶¹ Amy Simpson, “Mental Illness and the Church’s Mission: An Opportunity for Ministry”. AACC Conference Lecture. (lecture presented at AACC Conference, Nashville, TN, September 30, 2017).

illnesses. Only when the Church welcomes and accepts those with mental health issues instead of ostracizing them can it become a place where the “poor in Spirit” no longer have to hide.

Jesus the Healer of Racism: What Racial Reconciliation Requires of the Sick

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ABSTRACT:

This article approaches the topic of racism from the perspective of three healing narratives within the New Testament. 'Racism' is identified as a social sickness, the healing of which is dependent upon concrete action on the part of those who are sick. The New Testament accounts are analyzed from an ethno-racial perspective in order to identify actions incumbent upon the sick; summarized as desire, faith and courage.

I can see nothing more urgent than for America to work passionately and unrelentingly—to get rid of the disease of racism. Something positive must be done, everyone must share in the guilt as individuals and as institutions. The government must certainly share the guilt, individuals must share the guilt, even the church must share the guilt.²

If this society fails, I fear that we will learn very shortly that racism is a sickness unto death.³

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Introduction

Healing is a complex topic. This current publication will help to demonstrate this fact. At times healing is instantaneous, at other times it is progressive and in some circumstances, it does not seem to occur at all. Healing has always been an important part of the historical Pentecostal tradition. Predating both Charles Parham's 1901 Bible class in Topeka, Kansas as well as William Seymour and the Azusa Street Mission in 1906 was Dr. Charles Cullis (1833-1892) who prayed over the sick near the middle of the nineteenth century.⁴ Before Cullis, Dorothy Trudel (Switzerland), Johann Blumhardt (Germany) and others had set up prayer houses and networks for healing the sick in Europe.⁵ Since the early days of healing ministries, those who pray have had to come to terms with the reality that the sick are not always cured. One supposition which Pentecostals used to explain this reality was that something is required of the sick person in order to receive healing and the neglect of this duty could prevent healing from occurring. This may involve a confession of faith, forgiving past wrongs, or simply taking a "step of faith" such as throwing away crutches or prescription medicine. Not all Pentecostals endorse these or other 'proactive' measures, but it is a conviction which many Pentecostals still hold.⁶ This article hopes to build on these assumptions by suggesting that

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² Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, by Martin Luther King, Jr., ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 270.

³ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Showdown for Nonviolence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 70. Published posthumously.

⁴ For a general introduction to Charles Cullis and the 19th century healing movement in the United States see Heather D. Curtis, *Faith in the Great Physician: Suffering and Divine Healing in American Culture, 1860-1900* (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 2007).

⁵ For more information on these movements, see Heather D. Curtis, "The Global Character of Nineteenth-Century Divine Healing," in *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*, ed. Candy Gunther Brown, 29-45 (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011); James Robinson, *Divine Healing: The Formative Years, 1830-1890* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

⁶ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave cite seven reasons why healing does not occur, all of which assume that "the fault [of not receiving healing] does not lie with God. It must be with man, either in the one prayed for or in those who pray." *Foundations*

something may be required of the sick to heal not only physical ailments, but also social ailments. The site of this discussion is therefore not a physical body but a social and ecclesial one and the sickness is not physical but metaphysical: the disease of racism. The driving question of this article is this: *What is required of the church to receive healing from the disease of racism?*

To answer this question some justification for the concept of ‘racism as disease’ will be offered as well as a brief historical recap of race within Pentecostalism. Following this, three New Testament texts recording the healing of blind men (Mark 10:46-52; Matthew 9:27-31 and John 9) will be examined. Each will be given a brief textual analysis and commentary focusing on those elements germane to our guiding question. The stories will then be analyzed from an ethno-racial lens.⁷ A brief conclusion following this analysis will help to sum up the big ideas of each section. Through this process, three corresponding responsibilities for those who wish to be healed will be suggested: desire, faith and courage. This article will conclude that while healing from racism is something which only God is able to produce within the body of the church, the church also has a performative duty as it seeks healing from the disease of racism.

Racism as Disease

While there are many excellent definitions of racism, this essay defines it as a “social disease,” the prognosis of which is a malformed and stunted worldview.⁸ To make the claim that racism is a social disease is to affirm the following contentions.

First, racism is not natural but contractible. People are not born racist but become racist because of the society in which they live. Likewise, racism is not a natural byproduct of organizations (such as churches) but can be contracted by institutions and manifest systemic symptoms.⁹ To contract racism, a person or institution must only be socially integrated into an infected culture because the disease is part of the broader social environment and spreads through social contact. Sociologist Allan Johnson writes:

Nobody is the exception who miraculously doesn’t internalize any of the negative ideas, attitudes, or images that pour in a steady stream from the surrounding culture and make privilege and

of Pentecostal Theology (Los Angeles: Foursquare Media, 1987), 403-405. Interestingly, this perspective is tempered in the revised and updated version of *Foundations* released in 2016 which states: “We should not place unmerited blame upon those who are earnestly seeking healing.” But also acknowledges: “There are other times when clear hindrances prevent individuals from experiencing the healing of God.” Some of the reasons have changed since the original edition. Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology*, rev. ed., vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Foursquare Media, 2016), 47f.

⁷ Here, the term “ethno-racial” simply denotes that information which has applicability to the topic of ethnic and racial reconciliation.

⁸ From *Farlex Partner Medical Dictionary*, s.v. “disease,” 2012: “An interruption, cessation, or disorder of a body, system, or organ structure or function.” Two definitions of racism compatible with this concept are: “Any program or practice of discrimination, segregation, persecution, or mistreatment based on membership in a race or ethnic group.” Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University, 2017), 183; and “The systemic imposition of ethnocentrism or racial prejudice by one social group upon social structures and cultural practices that not only foster racial discrimination but also produce long-term racial disadvantage for another social group.” Rubén Rosario Rodríguez, *Racism and God-Talk: A Latino/a Perspective* (New York: New York University, 2008), 26.

⁹ As Dr. King writes: “White America has allowed itself to be indifferent to race prejudice and economic denial. It has treated them as superficial blemishes, but now awakes to the horrifying reality of a potentially fatal disease.” “Showdown for Nonviolence,” 71.

oppression happen as they do. In other words, on some level, *of course* I've internalized aspects of racism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism in myself in the same way that I automatically dream in English and prefer certain foods.¹⁰

Secondly, if left untreated, racism leads to spiritual death. There is a spiritual cost to racism which often goes undiscussed. Racism is damaging to one's soul because it stands as an affront to the *imago Dei* and hinders our ability to live out the *missio Dei*. Martin Luther King, Jr. once wrote: "The white man's personality is greatly distorted by segregation, and his soul is greatly scarred."¹¹ The spiritual harm of racism lies in the conscious or unconscious urge to "dominate, exclude, or seek to eliminate another [person]."¹² Theologian James Cone proposes that within Christian bodies, it manifests only where "self-interest and power corrupt their understanding of the Gospel."¹³ The end of racism is the destruction of the physical bodies of the oppressed, but its immediate affect is the destruction of the souls of the privileged. Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson write that racism "poisons the racist—crippling a woman's or a man's potential for authentic religious, cultural, social, moral, psychological, and spiritual growth. As intrinsic evil, racism is lethal to bodies, to black bodies, to the body of Christ, to Eucharist. Racism spoils the spirit and insults the holy; it is idolatry."¹⁴ As such, those people and institutions which have contracted racism are already infected with a spiritually fatal condition.

Third, and finally, to claim racism is a disease is to affirm that it is treatable and even potentially curable. Such a radical freedom from this disease is only possible through the work of the Great Physician. Again, McNeil and Richardson write: "In our human strength racial reconciliation is impossible. We are not able to change our hearts and transform our lives without the intervention of God."¹⁵ This disease is foreign to our bodies; there was a time when racism was not. Furthermore, racism is not the will of God because it leads to spiritual death. Like all diseases, racism will one day be destroyed either through the advancement of the Kingdom of God on earth or in the eschaton.

Missing from our definition of 'racism as disease' is a clear understanding of the systemic aspects of race and racism. Because sickness is something which generally happens to individuals, it is hard to imagine it as a systemic issue. Yet racism is both an individual and systemic phenomenon. For this reason, we must expand our understanding of 'disease' to include not only those things which affect our physical bodies (like the flu) but also that which affects our society (such as wealth disparity). If racism is a social disease then it should also be understood to manifest at both individual and social levels.¹⁶ Also at stake in this article is the charge of prioritizing the 'health' of racist people

¹⁰ Emphasis original. Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 107.

¹¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., "An Experiment in Love," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 19.

¹² George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2003), 170.

¹³ James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), xvii.

¹⁴ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 109.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁶ One work which excellently emphasizes the individual aspect of racism is Randy Woodley, *Living in Color: Embracing God's Passion for Ethnic Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004). The current standard on systemic racism is Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, rev. ed. (New York: New Press, 2011).

instead of attending to the wounds of their victims. As a White person, I need to be aware that my own racism will lead me to ignore the suffering of people of color in order to return all the focus onto myself and other White people. This mistake can only lead to greater oppression. At the same time, I acknowledge that if White people truly want to stop racism, the solution is not just to attend to the wounds of the people we have hurt, but also to stop hurting people. This work necessitates the transformation and deliverance of White minds and institutions from the disease of racism. The perpetrators must be rehabilitated, not only for the sake of their own souls, but for the sake of a world which continues to writhe under the pain of racism.

Historical Analysis

Historically, there were precious few times in Holiness-Pentecostal history when the disease of racism was absent or suppressed. Important nineteenth-century figures, including Amanda Smith and Maria Woodworth-Etter, experienced moments of racial equity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ The brief (first) season of the Azusa Street Mission (1906-1909) is frequently alluded to as a moment of racial harmony.¹⁸ Foursquare heritage also contains moments of racial harmony such as when Aimee Semple McPherson desegregated her revivals in Key West, Florida in 1918 or invited prominent Latino evangelist Francisco Olazábal to preach at Angelus Temple in 1927.¹⁹ A more modern example is the 1994 “Memphis Miracle” when the racially exclusionary Pentecostal Fellowship of North America disbanded in order to form the racially inclusive Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches of North America.²⁰ These and other occurrences of racial harmony are important as they illuminate the historicity of these issues and give us hope for future reconciliation. But at their best they are merely moments. None have produced true and lasting racial harmony; the disease has grown resistant. The reason for the failure of these moments is not only because of extreme prejudice but also because of the reality that racism is deeply entrenched within our societies. While healing tarries, it is incumbent upon the sick to ascertain if there is anything within us which is contributing to our ongoing illness.

With this context in mind, we will shift our focus to the stories of blind men in the New Testament. To do so is not to assume that blindness is ontologically related to racism, but there are similarities between the two maladies.

¹⁷ Both evangelists held interracial meetings often in spite of threats and acts of violence. Amanda Smith in particular saw a direct line between sanctification and the end of prejudice though admitted that “some people don’t get enough of the blessing to take the prejudice out of them, even after they are sanctified.” Amanda Smith, *An Autobiography: The Story of the Lord’s Dealings with Mrs. Amanda Smith, the Colored Evangelist* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1987 [1893]), 226. One of the best biographies of Maria Woodworth-Etter remains Wayne E. Warner, *The Woman Evangelist: The Life and Times of Charismatic Evangelist Maria B. Woodworth-Etter* (Metuchen: Scarecrow, 1986).

¹⁸ Pentecostal historian Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. calls the early Azusa revival: “one of the most racially inclusive, culturally diverse groups to gather in the city of Los Angeles at that time.” *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 88.

¹⁹ The primary source description of McPherson’s Key West revival can be found in “Colored Camp Meeting,” *Bridal Call* (Feb 1918). This source is accessible through pentecostalarchives.org. For a balanced discussion of McPherson’s relationship with Olazábal, see Gastón Espinosa, “Francisco Olazábal: Charisma, Power, and Faith Healing in the Borderlands,” in *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, ed. James R. Goff, Jr. and Grant Wacker (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas, 2002), 184-185.

²⁰ Theologian Frank Macchia pointedly wrote one year after Memphis: “Repentance cannot be a one-time event if it is to open a person to deeper insights and effect change throughout an institution. Will the denominational leaders and others that repented behind closed doors at Memphis initiate this act throughout the churches they represent?” “From Azusa to Memphis: Evaluating the Racial Reconciliation Dialogue Among Pentecostals,” *Pneuma* 17:1 (1995), 210.

First, racism principally affects the racist and only tangentially affects those around a person. In other words, the problem is not with the victim of racial oppression, the problem is with the racist. The fact that there is oppression is a result of the sickness present within the one affected. Second, racism and blindness both have the same general symptoms: a loss of sight. While blindness is the loss of physical sight, racism is the loss of spiritual sight: the inability to see the image of God within all peoples. Furthermore, racism blinds us to the suffering experienced by people and communities of color.²¹ Third, physical blindness in the first century was common and, apart from some isolated cases, was generally assumed to be incurable.²² Racism is also rampant within modern societies and even those familiar with its inner workings may harbor doubts about its curability.

As Jesus began his ministry, healing blindness became an identifier of His messianic mission. In Luke 4, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus enters a synagogue to read from the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."²³ Later, when John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the awaited Messiah, he responds with this proof: "The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them."²⁴ Finally, after Jesus drives out the money-changers in the temple, the crowds shout "Hosanna to the Son of David" as Jesus heals the blind and lame.²⁵ Restoring sight to the blind is linked to Jesus's Messianic claims. In the following analysis, we will consider three stories of Jesus healing blind men in order to discover the role of the sick in receiving their healing.

Desire

The well-known story of 'Blind Bartimaeus' is part of an important transitional section within the Gospel of Mark. In Mark 10:46-52 we read,

They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stood still and said, "Call him here." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; get up, he is calling you." So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, "What do you want me to do for you?" The blind man said to him, "My teacher, let me see again."⁵² Jesus said to him, "Go; your faith has made you well." Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.

²¹ As Korean American theologian Andrew Sung Park explains, seeing the suffering of others is a prerequisite for producing true racial healing: "However painful it may be, we must see suffering people around us. Only by seeing the reality of suffering people can we eliminate suffering." *Racial Conflict and Healing: An Asian American Theological Perspective* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 136.

²² See Gary M. Burge's discussion of blindness in *John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 272.

²³ Luke 4:18. All Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version.

²⁴ Matthew 11:2-5.

²⁵ Matthew 21:12-16.

In Mark 10:17 one sees that Jesus and his disciples were “setting out on a journey” which ultimately ends in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (11:1f). Between the journey’s beginning and end, there are three encounters between Jesus and people with questions or requests, separated by short discussions between Jesus and his disciples. These encounters form a contrasting triad which ends dramatically with the healing of Bartimaeus.

In the first encounter, as Jesus and his disciples are “setting out,” a rich man “ran up” (προσδραμὼν) to Jesus and asks what he must do “to inherit eternal life” (v. 17). Jesus acknowledges the difficulty of this task and tells the man to sell all of his possessions and only then to “come, follow me” (vv. 18-21). Having heard Jesus’ words, the man is “shocked” and goes away “sorrowful” (v. 22). A discussion follows as Jesus explains the relation of wealth to the kingdom of God (vv. 23-31). Next, as “they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem,” Jesus predicts his death and resurrection which leads James and John to approach (προσπορεύονται) Jesus and request to be seated beside him in his “glory” (vv. 32-37). Jesus acknowledges the difficulty of this task (“You do not know what you are asking”) and tells them this is not his right to grant (vv. 38-40). Having heard Jesus’ words, the disciples become “indignant” with the brothers. A discussion ensues as Jesus explains what ‘greatness’ is to be among Jesus-followers (vv. 38-45). These stories are then contrasted with the final narrative. Mark records that as they were “leaving Jericho,” Jesus is *not* approached by a man, but accosted by shouts of “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (vv. 46-48). The shouting man remains seated and it is Jesus who calls the man to come before him (vv. 49-50), and indeed he came (ἦλθεν). Jesus initiates the question: “What do you want me to do for you?” and the blind man asks for his eyesight to be restored (v. 51). Responding positively to the man’s request, Jesus restores his eyesight after which the man “followed him on the way” to Jerusalem (v. 52).

The main contrasts between these narratives revolve around the characters’ initial encounters with Jesus as well as the failure of the first two requests and Bartimaeus’ success. The story of the rich man and the sons of Zebedee both begin with the men coming towards Jesus (πρός), but Bartimaeus’ story begins with him crying out for mercy, being rebuked and finally being called by Jesus. While the other men initiated their encounters, Bartimaeus’ low social status may have prevented him from approaching Jesus. Perhaps he knew others had already been rejected from seeing Jesus because of their low social status (the children in 10:13-16).²⁶ Mark writes that Bartimaeus began “to shout out” (κράζειν, lit. “cry out”) when he heard Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. This verb (κράζω) is most often used in Mark to describe the presence of unclean spirits (3:11; 5:5-7; 9:24-26) but with Bartimaeus, the usage switches to that of intense emotion. The next people to “cry out” in the Gospel will be the crowds shouting “Hosanna!” in Jerusalem (11:9) and the last group will be the same crowds who shout “Crucify!” (15:13-14). The knowledge of Jesus passing by created a strong desire in Bartimaeus that he was unable to control; as if he were possessed, he began to “shout out” for mercy. Extreme dissatisfaction with his condition motivated him to do whatever he felt was necessary to gain an audience. But his cries caught the attention of the crowds who “sternly ordered him to be quiet.” Yet their rebuke only resulted in encouraging him to cry out “even more loudly.” His resolve to be heard by Jesus overcame the social pressure to be silent. A good thing it did too, because only after this act of defiance does Jesus “stand still” and call the man. This resolute determination is, according to Eduard Schweizer, “what Jesus’ present pathway to Jerusalem

²⁶ Here it was the disciples who “sternly warned (ἐπετίμησαν)” the people in the same way the crowds now “sternly ordered (ἐπετίμων)” Bartimaeus.

means, and only those who are like the blind man will share in the miracle of enlightenment.”²⁷ One commentator concludes: “The blind man’s persistence is exemplary; when people tell God’s elect that their cause is hopeless, they turn to him all the more resolutely and thus demonstrate their faith.”²⁸

Once Jesus has called the man, the crowd softens and encourages Bartimaeus to get up and so “throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came.” Whatever “throwing off his cloak” is meant to symbolize (and there are many theories ranging from literal to allegorical), it must be taken to mean something of an immediate departure.²⁹ Especially when combined with “sprang up and came,” the image is that he wasted no time in coming to Jesus. Bartimaeus’ whole body is engaged as he shouts, cries out even more loudly, throws off his cloak, springs up and comes to Jesus. There, he simply says “Rabbouni, that I may see” and is told: “Your faith has made you well.”³⁰ Bartimaeus’ resolve and determination continues to the very last verse of the pericope which records that he “followed him [Jesus] on the way” towards Jerusalem. Whether this is meant to indicate that Bartimaeus was somewhere present during the Passion narrative, the principle seems to be that those who have cried out to Jesus for mercy, those whom Jesus has called and restored, must also be prepared “follow him on the way” to Jerusalem and Golgotha.

The present analysis of this passage from the vantage point of ‘racism as disease’ will focus on two aspects of Bartimaeus’ experience, namely the dissatisfaction with his condition and his resolve to gain an audience with Jesus. Racism relies on the silence and acquiescence of those in society who have the means to oppose it. In other words, unless we become dissatisfied with racism and are willing to persist in its demise, it will continue to poison the well of society. Jerry Cook has observed that “the reason why attitudes [here we may substitute ‘worldviews’] are so difficult to change is because we are interpreting everything through them. Unless something is introduced into our life that will help us challenge and reject these toxic attitudes, a creeping death will poison all our relationships.”³¹ Something must cause us to be supremely dissatisfied with racism if we ever hope to find relief from this disease. Yet often we shut down conversations about race or racial inequity or inequality because of feelings of discomfort. We must ask ourselves if we are willing to die with this disease in our body or if we will risk social embarrassment and perceived dishonor by crying aloud “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us!”

It is not too dramatic to assert that we will be judged by future generations whether by our apathy or our determination to undo this sickness. African American Methodist Episcopal Bishop Reverdy C. Ransom once proclaimed: “American Christianity will un-christ itself if it refuses to strive on, until this Race Problem is not only settled, but settled right; and until this is done, however much men may temporize and seek to compromise, and cry ‘peace! peace!’ there will be no peace until this is done.”³² His prophetic words were repeated almost 60 years later by

²⁷ Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark*, trans. Donald H. Madvig (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 224–25.

²⁸ Joel Marcus, *Mark 8-16* (New Haven: Yale University, 2000), 763.

²⁹ For a brief survey of various interpretations see *ibid.*, 759–60.

³⁰ This is the only time Mark uses the affectionate *ραββουνι*. Jesus, for his response, tells the man to “Go (ὕπαγε),” a common command after a healing or deliverance (1:44; 2:11; 5:19, 34; 7:29).

³¹ Jerry Cook, “Healing Deadly Attitudes,” in *A Reader on Healing & Wholeness: Jesus--Our Hope for Wholeness* (Los Angeles: International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, 1994), 194.

³² Reverdy C. Ransom, “The Race Problem in a Christian State,” in *Critical Issues in American Religious History: A Reader*, ed. Robert R. Mathisen (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2001 [1906]), 357.

Pastor Kyle Haselden who wrote: "The duty of the white man is to undo as rapidly and as completely as possible the wrong he has done the Negro."³³ Now, about 60 years from this second warning, let us not allow the persistency of our condition to diminish our resolve. We must no longer tarry; we must end racism within the church now. We must be dissatisfied with the disease of racism just as Bartimaeus was dissatisfied with his blindness. We must cry out to Jesus or we will die in our sin.

As we follow the example of Bartimaeus, we should not be surprised when our new-found voice inspires opposition in those around us. Abolitionist and author Frederick Douglass said: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."³⁴ The sick must not become discouraged when progress is slow or when crowds sternly ask them to be quiet. Our resolve must be that we are more interested in receiving our healing than we are in satiating the anxious spirits of our fellow citizens. Dr. King reminds us that "human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable."³⁵ Our healing is dependent upon our resolve; therefore, let discouragement be our cue to cry out "even more loudly," remembering that Jesus did not stop and call Bartimaeus until after he had continued to cry out for mercy.

The story of Bartimaeus demonstrates two important ideas. First, social disease relies on the silent, passive permission of those who are sick. Second, to overcome this silence the sick must strongly desire for health and cry out for mercy. They must overcome their sense of social propriety, even their own sense of self-preservation for the sake of their health. King wrote that "the ultimate solution to the race problem lies in the willingness of men to obey the unenforceable."³⁶ The social obstacles before the sick are enormous. Like Bartimaeus, it is incumbent upon the sick to resist feelings of apathy and depression in exchange for desire and hope. "Let us not grow weary in doing what is right," writes the Apostle Paul, "for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up" (Gal. 6:9). Dissatisfaction with racism and the resolve to purge it from society mirrors God's own dissatisfaction and resolve. As the sick find resolve to contend for their healing, they do so with the second prerequisite of faith.

Faith

In Matthew 9:27-31, we read the following account:

As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, crying loudly, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he entered the house, the blind men came to him; and Jesus said to them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" They said to him, "Yes, Lord." Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you." And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, "See that no one knows of this." But they went away and spread the news about him throughout that district.

³³ Kyle Haselden, *The Racial Problem in Christian Perspective* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 19.

³⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Two Speeches, By Frederick Douglass* (Rochester: C. P. Dewey, 1857), 22.

³⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Case Against 'Tokenism'," in *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 110

³⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., "The Ethical Demands for Integration," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 124.

This passage is part of a larger section from Matthew where ten miraculous signs (chapters 8-9) set up the commission of the disciples (chapter 10).³⁷ The text is bookended by 7:28 (“Now when Jesus had finished [Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς] saying these things”) at the beginning and 11:1 (“Now when Jesus had finished [Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς] instructing his twelve disciples”) at the end. In 8:1, Jesus comes “down from the mountain” in a possible allusion to Moses.³⁸ One commentator suggests that the subsequent miracle section is meant to solidify Jesus’ authority and set up the charge to the disciples in 10:8 to “cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, [and] cast our demons.”³⁹ The main theme advanced in this miracle section is that of faith (and contrastingly, of doubt or unbelief). The word “faith” (πίστις) and its related forms are found seven times in chapters 8 and 9; a third of the usages in Matthew’s Gospel. ‘Faith’ becomes an important narrative tool, coming into play when Jesus commends the centurion (8:10, 13), chastises his disciples (8:26), forgives a paralyzed man (9:2) and heals a woman of an issuance of blood (9:22).⁴⁰ Here, the word is used more to demonstrate ‘confidence’ rather than ‘assurance’ (viz. 8:8).⁴¹ Conversely, Matthew demonstrates that a deficit of faith has the potential to stifle a responsive healing (cf., Matthew 21:21). Here Jesus responds to the faith presented to him. Sufficient faith plays an important dramatic role in this section as Jesus works miracles.

The story of the two blind men sits near the end of the miracle section and uses the theme of faith extensively. The faith of the blind men is shown three times. First, they proclaimed a confession of faith that Jesus is the “Son of David.” Second, Matthew points out that after Jesus ignored them and entered a house, “the blind men came to him” in an implicit pursuit of faith. Third, Jesus asked them pointedly “Do you believe I am able to do this?” to which they replied “Yes, Lord.” This last confession is the most explicit and is instigated by a curious question. Here is the only place in Matthew where Jesus asks a non-rhetorical question regarding his ability.⁴² Schweizer points out that Jesus’ question is contained within a ‘that I can do this’ clause (presumably the πιστεύετε ὅτι) which indicates a faith based on the behavior of God rather than rational reflection.⁴³ The question of belief is answered in the affirmative by the two men and Jesus tells them: “According to your faith (κατὰ τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν) let it be done to you” and the men’s eyes were opened. This κατὰ τὴν πίστιν is indicative of Jesus’ response to the centurion in 8:13 (ὡς ἐπίστευσας) and also (though less directly) of the healing of the paralyzed man in 9:2 (καὶ ἰδὼν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὴν πίστιν αὐτῶν). That is to

³⁷ As also suggested by Robert Edward Luccock, *Matthew* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1988), 8; and Barbara E. Reid, “The Gospel According to Matthew,” in *New Collegeville Bible Commentary: New Testament*, ed. Daniel Durken (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 23.

³⁸ The case for this allusion lies between Jesus who “had come down” (καταβάντος...ἀπὸ τοῦ ὄρους) and Moses who also “came down” (κατέβαινεν...ἐκ τοῦ ὄρους) in Exodus 34:29.

³⁹ Luccock, *Matthew*, 41.

⁴⁰ Other implied mentions of faith include 8:2; 9:18, 33. Corresponding accounts of ‘faithlessness’ also occur in 9:3, 23-24, 34 and to a lesser degree 8:21.

⁴¹ This follows after Bultmann’s idea of the word communicating “dependable truth” or “trust in what is real.” Rudolph Bultmann, “πιστεύσω,” *TDNT* 6:176.

⁴² The only other related place is 26:53 where Jesus asks a rhetorical question of Pilate.

⁴³ This clause points to “a confidence manifested in every action of life, not just intellectual assent.” Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 231. Other occurrences of this phrase also linked to faith essential for a devout walk are Mark 11:23-34; John 4:42, 6:69, 10:38, 11:42, 14:10-12; Romans 6:8, 10:9; 1 Thessalonians 4:14; Hebrews 11:6.

say, Jesus acts in response to the faith which has been displayed (though not proportional to that faith). The message Matthew seems to be communicating is that it is the faith of the blind men which initiates Jesus' responsive healing (and not the other way around).

In terms of ethno-racial analysis, focus will be given to Jesus' question: "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" Although Jesus does not mention their condition, we assume that he is discussing their blindness. One can imagine the confusion if the "this" of Jesus' question had in fact referred to a different physical ailment than what the blind men expected. As it is, Jesus and the blind men are in full agreement on the topic at hand: They are blind and in need of sight. William James suggests that "things come to us in the first instance *as ideas*; and that if we take them for realities, it is because we *add something to them*, namely, the predicate of having also '*real existence outside of our thought*.'" ⁴⁴ Between Jesus and the two men is the reality of their blindness. But this shared reality is by no means guaranteed. Where we have suspicions about truth-telling or when we become implicated in someone's reality, we may resist adding the predicate of reality to another's idea. This certainly seems to be the case for prejudice within the church. Although the bibliography tracking the history and modern reality of racism within the church continues to grow annually, the topic remains taboo in many contexts. ⁴⁵ This presents a significant problem in that, while some have agreed on the issue at hand, others doubt its existence or scale. Johnson writes: "If dominant groups *really* saw privilege and oppression as unacceptable . . . privilege and oppression wouldn't have much of a future. But this isn't what's happening." ⁴⁶ Instead the church has largely decided to remain disengaged on this topic.

Jesus' question in verse 28 implies an agreement on the reality of "this" and the subsequent healing is dependent upon this agreement. Conversely, healing from the disease of racism tarries because we doubt the existence of the problem. We do not accept the reality and scale of racial inequality and inequity. Not believing we are sick, we cannot respond positively when Jesus asks us if we believe He can do "this." We must demonstrate our confidence in the reality of our ailment before we can come into the proverbial house where the Healer resides.

On another level, the blind men also had to have confidence that Jesus was capable of healing their sight. Jesus' words "Do you believe?" forced the men to disclose their confidence in Jesus as a healer. In a modern context, do we truly believe that God is able, willing and ready to bring racial reconciliation to our communities, churches and world? It has taken centuries for Western societies (and through Western societies, the rest of the world) to intertwine racism into the fabric of their social networks. It would stand to reason that to disentangle these webs should take centuries to complete. Do we believe that Jesus is able to do this? It is incumbent upon the sick to ask for healing in full confidence of God's ability to do this very thing. The Apostle James writes: "Ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord." ⁴⁷ In his commentary on our passage, St.

⁴⁴ Emphasis original. William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987 [1890]), 659.

⁴⁵ A full bibliography is outside the scope of this article. An example a bibliography produced by Princeton University can be found at <https://blogs.princeton.edu/raceandreligion/bibliography>. Two important and recent additions are Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces That Keep Us Apart* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity), 2013 and Sarah Shin, *Beyond Colorblind: Redeeming Our Ethnic Journey* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017).

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*, 69.

⁴⁷ James 1:6–7.

Hilary of Poitiers writes: "Because the blind men had believed, they saw . . . which means we must understand that what is sought for has to be gained by faith, not that faith is to be achieved by accomplishments."⁴⁸ Faith initiates freedom. An acknowledgement of the reality of racism and of God's ability to bring shalom to our racially divided world is a prerequisite for true healing to occur.

Faith opens our eyes to present realities. It invites us to have confidence in God's ability to heal and also in the reality of our disease. A lack of faith would have prevented the blind men from entering the house where Jesus hid. It would have caused them to question Jesus' ability. Faith opens their mouth, pushes them forward and causes them to make a good confession. "Christian faith is the meeting with this 'Immanuel,'" writes theologian Karl Barth, "the meeting with Jesus Christ and in Him with the living Word of God."⁴⁹ Beyond simply an acknowledgement, faith involves a 'being with.' Faith is the initiative step of an active encounter with Christ. In the same way, if we desire to find healing from the reality of racism, we must have faith that God is able to bring it about.

Courage

Let us now consider four texts from John chapter nine: vv. 6-7; vv. 13-17; vv. 24-28; and vv. 34-38. Here we read the following:

⁶ . . . [Jesus] spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, ⁷ saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see . . . ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet." . . . ²⁴ For the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses . . . ³⁴ And they drove him out. ³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.⁵⁰

While our focus will be on the above section, the pericope for this story ought to be extended to 10:21 where Jesus finishes his discussion with the Pharisees. The actual healing miracle itself is bookended by 9:1 where Jesus

⁴⁸ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *Commentary on Matthew*, trans. D. H. Williams (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2012), 108.

⁴⁹ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 17.

⁵⁰ For the sake of analysis, we have condensed the chapter down to those verses most germane to the focus of this article, though the entire chapter will be referenced.

“saw” (εἶδεν) the blind man and verse 37 where the blind man “had seen” (εἶδον) Jesus.⁵¹ In these verses, sight is not only physical but an acknowledgement of another person akin to revelation and presence.⁵² The miracle plays out in a number of dramatic scenes, including the site of healing (vv. 1-7), the interrogation of the neighbors (vv. 8-12), the man before the Pharisees (vv. 13-17), the man’s parents before the Pharisees (vv. 18-23), the man before the Pharisees a second time (vv. 24-34) and meeting Jesus again (vv. 35-38). These scenes are followed by a discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees (9:39-10:21). The driving force of the passage are the many questions regarding Jesus’ identity (vv. 10, 12, 16, 17, 26, 27, 35, 36), the man’s identity (vv. 8, 19) and the role of sin (vv. 2, 34, 40).

As the story progresses, the man’s confession of Jesus’ identity develops from a complete lack of knowledge (v. 12) to “a prophet” (v. 17) to a “man from God” (v. 33) to the “Son of Man” who is worthy of worship (v. 38). In Mark, the hostility towards the blind man came prior to the healing but here hostility occurs after the fact. Threats against the man intensify from general questioning (v. 15), to suspicion (v. 18), to intimidation (v. 22), to insult (v. 28), and finally to an accusation of sin and excommunication (v. 34). The story describes escalating conflict and provides a model for fidelity in the face of hostility. As he is subjected to this hostility, the man continues to deepen his understanding of Jesus without the presence of Jesus (in line with John 20:29). As Karoline Lewis comments, the miracle itself becomes Jesus’ presence and the man’s testimony produces “the capacity to believe.”⁵³ In F. F. Bruce’s words, the man’s testimony is made up of “the language of plain common sense”⁵⁴ born out of a vivid experience which he cannot deny.⁵⁵ It was this “personal experience” of Jesus’ healing power that “gave him courage to point out the irrelevant speech of the religious leaders.”⁵⁶ The man’s testimony is organic, simple and straight-forward. He refuses to deny what has happened to him.

For all of his courage, the man ultimately faces rejection from the religious leaders who are unable to deal with what one commentator calls the “unbelievable and blasphemous truth, that Jesus is from God.”⁵⁷ Because of the man’s display of courage, John 9 can serve as an exemplary passage for new believers and those suffering persecution.⁵⁸ Bruce writes that his “testimony has been repeated innumerable times by men and women who have found in his words the means of communicating their own experience of deliverance from spiritual blindness.”⁵⁹ The man courageously withstands the barrage of social pressure based on his singular encounter with a Savior he has never even seen. Courage, therefore, becomes a defining attribute of this miracle and is the central focus of this ethno-racial analysis.

⁵¹ The preferred word for “sight” in this chapter is otherwise βλέπω with ὁράω appearing only at the bookends.

⁵² Viz. John 1:18, 3:32, 11:33, 12:40.

⁵³ Karoline M. Lewis, *John* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014), 128.

⁵⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel & Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), 218.

⁵⁵ This stands in contrast to the Pharisees’ theological training and is especially apparent in 9:24-34.

⁵⁶ Jey J. Kanagaraj, *John: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 2013), 103.

⁵⁷ Lewis, *John*, 131.

⁵⁸ He is the “model believer, witnessing publicly and courageously to the truth.” Willard M. Swartley, *John* (Harrisonburg: Herald Press, 2013), 230.

⁵⁹ Bruce, *Gospel & Epistles of John*, 217.

Courage is the third requirement of those who wish to be free from the disease of racism. Catholic theologian and humanitarian Jean Vanier writes: “I am beginning to discover how fear is a terrible motivating force in all our lives. We are frightened of those who are different . . . Fear is at the root of all forms of exclusion, just as trust is at the root of all forms of inclusion.”⁶⁰ Of course it takes a great deal of courage to reach out to those who are different from us and befriend a stranger. But it takes even more courage to do what this formerly blind man did and speak when silence may protect us. When reflecting on the temporary failure of his work in Birmingham, AL, Dr. King wrote these words:

Certainly Birmingham had its decent white citizens who privately deplored the maltreatment of Negroes. But they remained publicly silent. It was a silence born of fear—fear of social, political and economic reprisals. The ultimate tragedy of Birmingham was not the brutality of the bad people, but the silence of the good people.⁶¹

To speak is to be exposed to risk. On topics such as racial inequity, we especially risk making mistakes; indeed, we risk our reputation and we may risk future retributive hostilities. Of these risks, we should not be unaware.

However, alongside considering the risks of providing testimony, we must also consider the risks of silence. As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel reminds us: “Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”⁶² Racism today operates a “covert and institutionalized system” rather than the “brutal and overt” one traditionally identified as ‘racist.’⁶³ The symptoms of racism today are not burning crosses but quiet disengagement from social justice and silent acquiescence to continued inequity. Through the courageous testimony of the church the ability of racism to work silently is opposed.⁶⁴ Like the healed man, we must summon the courage to own our experiences, even though it may mean rejection from our peers. We must learn to make ‘common’ the sufferings and joys of others in the same way that God, through Christ has made us ‘common’ with Himself and given us also the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). We have an obligation to provide a good confession to the singular experience which Christ has wrought within us. For those of us who are becoming increasingly aware of racism and its effects on our bodies, we must find the courage to witness to the reality of transformation through Christ. If we neglect this duty, we risk seeing healing slip through our fingers.

The church has been given a special role within creation. We are the visible body of Christ, the visible witness of the reality of God to all creation. In this sense, according to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, we follow in the footsteps of the Incarnation which has laid “a claim to a space of its own on earth.”⁶⁵ This is why, he writes, “the Body of Christ can

⁶⁰ Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 71.

⁶¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Why We Can’t Wait,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 528.

⁶² Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Marion Wiesel (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 118.

⁶³ Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 3.

⁶⁴ Developmental Psychologist Beverly Tatum wrote: “Once the silence is broken, the cycle of racism becomes increasingly visible.” *“Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?” And Other Conversations About Race* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 96.

⁶⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), 248.

only be a visible Body, or else it is not a Body at all.”⁶⁶ In the words of Stanley Grenz, we are here to “proclaim in word and action the principles of the kingdom” and more importantly, to “show forth the divine reality—to be the image of God....to reflect the very character of God.”⁶⁷ Our mission is that of witness; to point the world toward Christ and Christ’s reality. This is the prophetic ministry of the church and the reason we are still on this earth. Insofar as we have neglected to bear a courageous witness against racism, to point to the reality of God and away from the callous, silent indifference of this world towards the cancer of racism, we have failed to be prophetic. Insofar as we have shirked our duty to make bold stands against racism both within our churches and within society, we have forsaken our Lord and abandoned our calling. Sometimes in making a good witness, the path is easy and well-lit, and saying the right thing is painfully obvious. At other times, there are no easy answers and like the man from John 9, we must be courageous in the face of increasing hostility. Healing from racism necessitates the courage to testify to the reality of wholeness in Christ.

Conclusion

In this article, I began with the premise that racism is a social disease and as such, it is right to seek God’s healing power to correct it within our bodies (both individual and institutional). But as we have acknowledged, healing has not occurred. This leads us to make an honest appraisal of ourselves to determine if we are hindering God’s healing work. Having analyzed three healing narratives from the New Testament, it was found that desire, faith and courage are incumbent upon the sick to receive healing. We should not think of these as ‘check boxes’ for healing, but our requests for healing will not be tolerated without them. First, we must desire to be healed. Jesus encourages us: “Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.”⁶⁸ Second, when we ask it must be in faith. James reminds us: “Ask in faith, never doubting.”⁶⁹ Finally, we must testify courageously regarding the reality of reconciliation in Christ. As Jesus said, we must not be worried about our testimony for “what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”⁷⁰ In these ways, the body of Christ fulfills its mandate to point a disordered and ailing world to the healing power of the risen Christ.

⁶⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959), 248.

⁶⁷ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 483.

⁶⁸ Matthew 7:7.

⁶⁹ James 1:6.

⁷⁰ Matthew 10:19-20.