

JESUS HEALS PEOPLE OF UNSPECIFIED INFIRMITIES

Matthew 8:14–15

Jesus went home with Peter and saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and served them.

Mark 1:29-31

Jesus heals Simon's mother-in-law

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus, James, and John went home with Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed, sick with a fever, and they told Jesus about her at once. He went to her, took her by the hand, and raised her up. The fever left her, and she served them.

Luke 4:38–39

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus went home with Simon. Simon's mother-in-law was sick with a high fever, and the family asked Jesus to help her. He bent over her and spoke harshly to the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and served them.

Matthew 14:34-36

When they had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret. When the people who lived in that place recognized him, they sent word throughout that whole region, and they brought to him everyone who was sick. Then they begged him that they might just touch the edge of his clothes. Everyone who touched him was cured.

Mark 6:53-56

When Jesus and his disciples had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret, anchored the boat, and came ashore. People immediately recognized Jesus and ran around that whole region bringing sick people on their mats to wherever they heard he was. Wherever he went—villages, cities, or farming communities—they would place the sick in the marketplaces and beg him to allow them to touch even the hem of his clothing. Everyone who touched him was healed.

Mark 7:31-37

After leaving the region of Tyre, Jesus went through Sidon toward the Galilee Sea through the region of the Ten Cities. Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged him to place his hand on the man for healing. Jesus took him away from the crowd by himself and put his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. Looking into heaven, Jesus sighed deeply and said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up." At once, his ears opened, his twisted tongue was released, and he began to speak clearly.

Jesus gave the people strict orders not to tell anyone. But the more he tried to silence them, the more eagerly they shared the news. People were overcome with wonder, saying, "He does everything well! He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who can't speak."

FAITH HEALING

IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES

The tradition of healing through the power of prayer or faith is found throughout the Bible. More of these stories are about Jesus than anyone else, but there are other healers, including some much earlier than Jesus. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the prophet proclaims healing and the people are healed. The faith of the people is not mentioned, though there is often a ritual they have to follow for the healing to take effect.

In the Hebrew Scriptures healing is associated with Moses and the prophets, specifically with Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and Isaiah.

- **Numbers 21:4-9** God directs Moses to make a snake of bronze and raise it on a pole. Anyone who looks at it is cured of snakebite.
- **1 Kings 17:7-24** The prophet Elijah raises the son of a foreign widow from death.
- **2 Kings 4:8-36** The prophet Elisha raises the son of a foreigner from death.
- **2 Kings 5:1-19** The prophet Elisha heals a foreigner, Naaman, an Assyrian military officer of leprosy.
- **Isaiah 38:1-5** God hears the prayers of King Hezekiah and heals him.

HEALINGS OF JESUS

- Jesus easily performs more healing miracles than anyone else in the Bible. As we have studied these, there have been several interesting points.
- Jesus uses different methods quite a bit. Sometimes he lays his hands on someone. Sometimes he places his spittle or mud made with his spittle on a wound. Sometimes he speaks to the person and they are healed. Sometimes he proclaims that someone who is not physically present has been healed. In one case, the healing happens because someone touched Jesus without his knowing it.
- Jesus often associates healing with forgiveness. He doesn't say that it is some unforgiven sin that has caused an illness (in fact he specifically says this is not the case in one story). The connection he makes is that the power to heal and the power to forgive both come from God, and both restore broken lives.
- In other parts of the Bible, a healing may simply be a miraculous sign of power but the healings of Jesus are always also lessons about God's Kingdom.
- Jesus associates healing with faith, but whose faith is not always the same. In some stories it is the person who is healed whose faith has made them well. In the case of the children who are healed, it is usually the faith of the parent. In the case of the paralyzed man lowered through the roof, Jesus says the faith of the man's friends has healed him.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Outside of the healing stories of Jesus, these are usually associated with the Twelve and other apostles. In the Gospels, Jesus sends the Twelve out to heal and cast out demons, though we don't get any specific stories. All of the Apostles' healings are found in Acts. Like the healings in the Hebrew Scriptures, there are generally not

- **Acts 3:1-11** Peter and John heal a lame beggar.
- **Acts 5:12-16** Peter heals many sick people.
- **Acts 8:5-8** Philip heals many people.
- **Acts 9:32-35** Peter heals a man who has had palsy for 8 years.
- **Acts 9:36-42** Peter raises a girl named Tabitha (Dorcas) from death.
- **Acts 14:8-10** Paul heals a man who has never walked.
- **Acts 16:16-18** Paul casts a spirit of divination out of a girl.
- **Acts 20:7-12** Paul raises a man named Eutychus from death.
- **Acts 28:7-9** Paul heals Publius' father of fever and hemorrhage.
- **1 Corinthians 12** Paul mentions that healing is one of the gifts of the Spirit.

There are even a story of healers who are not followers of Jesus. There is no hint that they are phonies, but they are much less effective than the Apostles.

- **Acts 19:13-17** The seven sons of the Jewish priest Sceva have been casting out evil spirits. When they use the names of Jesus and Paul on one demon, it doesn't work and the demon throws them out.

IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Outside the Bible, there are stories of others performing miraculous acts of healing. This is usually the action of a great and/or virtuous person and I have not found one where the faith of the person healed is mentioned.

- Tacitus reports that the Roman general (later emperor) Vespasian once healed a blind man and a man with a crippled hand.
- The first century philosopher, Apollonius of Tyana, is said to have healed people, even raising a young woman back to life on one occasion.
- The first century Rabbi Hanina ben Dosa was also credited with healing and other miracles. In particular, he seemed to know in advance which of his prayers would meet with success and which with failure.

IN CHURCH TRADITION

There are often miracles associated with the saints of the Catholic Church. In fact, verifying a miraculous healing or other miracle is one of the steps of the canonization. Several of the Catholic saints are especially associated with healing and praying for their intercession is common. The focus is more on the holiness of the saint than the faith of the individual, but both aspects are considered important. The saints of healing include:

- St. Anne Infertility
- St. Juliana Falconieri Chronic Illness
- St. Agatha Breast Ailments
- St Peregrine Laziosi Cancer
- St. Aloysius Gonzaga AIDS Patients
- St. James the Greater Arthritis and Rheumatism
- Blessed Margaret of Castello Disabilities

Pilgrimages to places where miracles of healing or special visions have happened are also common in Catholic tradition. Places where people go to seek healing include:

- Chimayó Santa Fe, New Mexico
- Lourdes France
- Medjugorje Bosnia
- Glastonbury Tor England
- Our Lady of Guadalupe Basilica Mexico City
- Madron Well Cornwall

MODERN FAITH HEALERS

Faith healing is also a tradition in Protestant Christianity, especially in the Pentecostal churches. This style of faith healing, which is and Pentecostal churches. The model of the faith-healing preacher which is familiar through revival meetings and televangelism, took shape in the early 20th century and took on it's most recognizable form after WW-2. Some of the better known faith healers have been:

- Aimee Semple McPherson William M. Branham
- Oral Roberts Kenneth Copeland
- Pat Robertson Benny Hinn
- Peter Popoff

SCIENCE AND FAITH HEALING

Does faith healing work? Through the 20th and 21st centuries, skepticism about faith healing among doctors has increased. Science wants results that are predictable, repeatable, and testable, and faith healing doesn't lend itself to this. Studies of whether prayer can help gravely ill persons have yielded inconsistent results.

Remote Prayer—This is the idea that people (even strangers) praying for a person at a distance can have a positive effect. Some studies have seemed to confirm this, others have seen no difference between patients who were prayed for and those who were not. Still other studies have even shown that this prayer has a negative impact on the patient's health.

Personal Prayer—There are much clearer results for the effects of a person's regular prayer life on their health. Prayer has been seen to reduce stress, lower blood pressure, and produce other benefits similar to those gained through meditation. It seems that a sense of closeness to God and the inner peace and lack of fear that creates are beneficial to physical health.

Placebo Effect—One of the most interesting recent findings has to do with the placebo effect. A placebo is a treatment that has no medical value, but which can produce benefits if the patient thinks it will. What has been discovered now is that healing through placebo is possible, even if the patient is aware that the treatment is a placebo.

Researchers suggest that a lot of the effectiveness of the placebo seems to come from the rituals of a doctor's visit, the examination, the diagnosis, the writing down of a prescription, etc. The ritual seems to help even when the treatment has no medical benefit. In other words, this is a sort of faith healing.

FRAUD

A repeated charge against faith healers is that they use trickery to convince people they have miraculous powers. Professional magician, James Randi, has worked to debunk faith healers, professional psychics, and others for decades. In his 1987 book, **The Faith Healers**, Randi details techniques such as sleight-of-hand, audience plants, and "cold reading" developed by magicians to fake healings. He asserts that many (maybe all) faith healers use this sort of trickery and specifically mentions Peter Popoff, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson.

I have not found any prosecutions or convictions for fraud based on these allegations. I can say that the illusions Randi demonstrates look very much like what some faith healers do.

SO WHAT THEN?

How do we as Christians absorb all of this? I can only offer my personal assessment. Personal prayer is a good habit that can have a strong positive effect on health and healing. Faith in God is a powerful positive force and can have a positive effect on our health and healing.

The healing rituals of a church can have a very positive effect on a person's health and healing. We have the promise of people with the gift of healing in our faith community. I think we should trust in this promise, even if we do not fully understand it.

Now, as in Jesus' lifetime, there are hucksters who pretend to have healing powers to enrich themselves. We should beware of these.

I think we should trust that God also works through the care and efforts of medical science and professional healthcare workers. This is one of the places where we are most likely to find people with the gift of healing, and is a resource we should never explore.

Those are my thoughts. What do you think?

Faith Healing Shouldn't Work, but It Does

How to explain faith healing

Posted Mar 02, 2011 – Psychology Today

In my previous post, I discussed whether antidepressants work mainly via suggestion, or the placebo effect. A placebo resembles faith healing. Yet faith healing is usually considered more a matter of belief in magic and the supernatural rather than confidence in the science of pharmacology.

From a scientific perspective, faith healing is unexplained, incomprehensible, and should not work. Yet it does work. The same is true of drug placebo effects, of course. Scientists recognize that there are placebo effects but have trouble accounting for them.

If you grew up in a superstitious country, chances are you experienced faith healing. Here are some examples from my own childhood in Ireland:

- Children born after their father's death were understood to have the cure for thrush, a throat infection.
- The seventh son of a seventh son had special powers, such as the ability to cure ringworm.
- A cure for warts was inherited in some families.

Such traditional faith healers generally practiced for free, although strangers might wish to compensate them for their inconvenience with a small gift. Given that these services were genuinely free, and given that faith healers considered it immoral to demand payment for their special gift, they were widely used. What of the results?

The proof of the pudding

One year, my sisters and myself became infected with ringworm - a fungal infection that may be acquired from contact with farm animals. The man with the cure was a local bachelor farmer who could be encountered early in the morning harvesting mushrooms in our pasture. He welcomed us to his cottage and treated our ringworm by drawing a wedding ring across each lesion, making the sign of the cross. "They should be gone in a month," he said. Sure enough, all disappeared in about three weeks.

A close friend had a similar experience with warts. The faith healer knotted pieces of knitting wool above each wart, without touching it, while reciting a Hail Mary. The warts fell off within a month.

Most scientists cope with such evidence through simple skepticism. Perhaps the ostensible "cure" had no connection with the outcome. Without treatment, the time course of recovery would be exactly the same. It is certainly true that ringworm undergoes spontaneous healing. This is a seasonal phenomenon, however with the

rash characteristically flourishing during wet, or humid, seasons and spontaneous recovery would have required several months, not a few weeks.

The girl had also had her warts for at least two years, so that their accidental recovery in a month was even more unlikely.

It is always hard to make much sense of such anecdotal phenomena to the satisfaction of scientists but faith healing seems to evoke a placebo effect, not unlike the use of drugs to treat people who are mildly depressed (and therefore experience no true pharmacological response to the medicine).

When people receive a prescription drug, such as Zoloft, or Paxil, they expect improvement and are fair game for a strong placebo response. Why should recipients of faith healing expect to get better? Several elements of the situation conspire to give patients the expectation that they will get better.

To begin with, there is the mumbo jumbo about which individuals acquire the gift to heal a specific malady. Notice how the pagan aspects of faith healing, or “superstition” are combined with Christianity so as to convey the impression that different supernatural forces are working on the problem. Social pressure might also be a factor as we feel pressure to believe in the cure after the manner of The Emperor's New Clothes.

If there is a history of successful outcomes, then people who consult the faith healer are likely to show up because they already have a positive expectation of cure, even if they consider themselves too sophisticated to be taken in by magical thinking.

By means unknown, faith healing is evidently capable of boosting immune function. This would explain why minor lesions clear up faster than would otherwise be the case. If placebos account for half of the effects of non surgical medicine (which may be too conservative) faith healing may be a trillion-dollar industry in the U.S.

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Faith Healing in the Modern World

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Faith_healing