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Will God Heal You?

**Like everyone else, Christians are subject to illness, suffering, death.
For healing - is faith all that's needed?**

by James McBride

For most of mankind, there's one way to deal with illness. You go to the 'medicine man'. In most nations today that means a medical doctor who can call upon a range of medical and surgical specialists, impressive technology and an endless range of pharmaceutical products. Or you may choose from a variety of alternative treatments: herbal medicines, acupuncture, homeopathy etc. And indeed the line between them all is increasingly blurred as doctors refer patients for these alternatives.

Medical practice, however, has its limitations. If you don't have an adequate health service or it simply is non-existent - where do you turn? Or what if the medical profession runs out of solutions? Religion often promises relief. The answer for many may lie in the local voodoo practice or the 'witch-doctor' - in fact often an expert in herbal medicine though embedded in a confusion of religious ceremony and hocus-pocus. In the West it may be the use of mystical crystals or healing pyramids.

Most Christians, too, will first turn to modern medicine when physical ailments strike. But many 'turn to God alone' for healing. They see in the Christian Scriptures that God is revealed as Jahveh-Ropheka - God the Healer. They read that 'by Jesus' stripes we are healed'. Healing crusades attended by, in some nations, literally millions hold the promise of the restoration of sight, a cure for cancer, the ability to walk again - even restoration to life. Famous names like Benny Hinn or Reinhard Bonnke minister in this way to enthusiastic multitudes around the world.

Biblical Healing

The ministry of the first Christian apostles was marked by such miraculous healings. The blind saw, the lame walked, the dead were raised. God did heal, and mightily. When a man lame from birth walked into the presence of the religious leadership there was no doubt it was authentic (Acts 3, 4:14). Unlike the efforts of modern Christian healers! (A recent examination of one such 'crusade' found not one of seventy-eight officially claimed healings was proven.)

And God does heal today. Many Christians can testify to His healing power over physical and psychological illness. James, the brother of Jesus, instructed the church on how to set about this, and many Christians today follow that practice. [Request the free article What Do You Do When You Are Ill] But should Christians solely 'rely on God' for healing? Should they, as advocated by some church leaders, steer clear of all medical practice?

Between Black and White

Some Christians whose desire is to trust God for healing face a dilemma. In what circumstances is it acceptable to have medical attention and when should we 'rely on God alone'?

On the one hand they understand the concept of personal responsibility in health matters. The Scriptures clearly give us some practical guidance: rules of physical and mental hygiene, dietary laws etc. Ignore them - as did most of the mediaeval world - and you suffer. But there are also examples of 'direct action': the use of antiseptic, anaesthesia, ointments,

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first aid, undisclosed methods of 'causing to be healed' etc. Medicines 'did good' (Proverbs 17:22). And Ezekiel speaks well of them in a millennial setting (Ezekiel 47:12). A range of remedies was widely used in ancient Israel.

On the other hand, the Scriptures teach that God is our Healer and we are to have faith. So 'where do we draw the line?' is a question often posed. They perceive 'grey areas' and confusion arises. Yet, logically, any human intervention - whether 'herbal' or 'normal' - negates the notion that we should rely solely on God for healing. No dentist, no headache remedies, no bone-setting, no alternative medicine!

Is there a difference between medical intervention for a tooth abscess and for an appendix abscess? Or between an aspirin and an antibiotic? Between major surgery to reconstruct a shattered pelvis and surgery for a blocked colon or heart by-pass or a cancer? The first option is considered acceptable by most who desire to 'trust God alone' while the latter alternative has to be 'in God's hands'. Then there's the artificial distinction between 'natural' remedies and 'drugs'. In fact, most drugs are derived from 'natural remedies' and are concentrations of the active healing principle in plants etc - and therefore generally more effective, potent and controlled.

A Touch of History

Archaeology unearths evidence of a range of ancient surgical procedures - even brain surgery! I imagine it was pretty risky. As were the various 'healing potions' gathered from nature. Because the 'cures' were dodgy they became linked with religious ritual to empower them. And the priests - they were pagan - became involved. The healing arts became associated with magic. And that's the source of much Christian superstition about healing. Some few Christians believe medicine - even modern medicine - is somehow associated with the demonic, with Baal'Zebub, the 'god of Ekron' (II Kings 2:1ff). Yet in this incident King Azariah's sin was in seeking guidance about the outcome of his injury - not healing - from that 'no god' (I Corinthians 8:5-6, 10:20).

Today, medicine has grown up - though given the complexity of the human body it's still more art than science! But modern medicine is no longer associated with religion. Medical practice today is knowledge

based. It is increasingly technological - and dedicated, skilled doctors and surgeons and researchers devote themselves to improved techniques of healing broken and sick bodies. Modern Western medicine isn't 'of the devil!' 'Health', however, is worshiped as a god - we all want to be vibrantly healthy, and as the 'people of God' Christians often feel they have a right to it. But sin has entered the world. The human body decays into deafness, poor sight, arthritis and all the ills to which mankind is - through Adam - heir (Ecclesiastes 12).

Who wouldn't avail themselves of a modern burns or spinal injury unit? Yet such treatments may be just as invasive as the removal of a tumour. Suffer a compound fracture and 'leave it to God' to heal and you may well experience gangrene or an incurable infection and certainly deformity. Not that God can't or won't heal but that He would expect you to get attention! And there's no logical - or spiritual - reason why that principle should not apply in every form of illness, major or minor.

Balance of Risk

Our choice of treatment is a balance of risk. Doctors will discuss that with you. There are competent surgeons and physicians and herbalists and acupuncturists - and there are incompetent practitioners and charlatans in both camps. A drug or herbal remedy may be effective in the hands of one prescriber and not with the next. I can but glean whatever knowledge I can, perhaps obtain 'a second opinion' - and then I must make the decision: get treatment, or suffer without treatment and 'let nature take its course' (it usually does). And recover or die.

Using honey or olive leaves and not an antibiotic may seem to be more 'natural' (though less effective) - but both are a human intervention whether or not we call on God to heal! Herbs won't set a compound fracture or repair an aneurysm or cure a cardiac arrest. In any illness we simply and wisely ask: which treatment poses less risk (and all drugs carry risk) and what will be most effective to restore health?

And underlying all is the matter of faith.

The Nature of Faith

No Christian will quarrel with the need for 'faith!' But the nature of faith is often misunderstood. Faith is a way of life: 'The just shall live by faith'. It's not a one-

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off injection of spiritual energy focused on a specific disease you have acquired. Faith is the principle that undergirds every aspect of our life in Christ. It is trust - trust, belief, in the existence of the all powerful God (Hebrews 11:6). None of the spiritual giants in the 'faith chapter' are praised for having faith to be healed! They all died 'not having received the promises' (v.13).

Our faith becomes visible only through our submission to the will and word of God. It results in action: 'I show you my faith by what I do', says James. Should we become seriously ill we express our faith by calling for the church elders (James 5:14), and by taking advantage of the best treatment at our disposal. In calling for the elders we publicly place the outcome of our illness in the hands of God. In seeking medical attention, and by taking sensible health precautions (eg stop smoking, improve our diet, exercise, control resentment or other negative spiritual traits etc) we are doing our part - showing our faith by our works. Even were the treatment to fail then our faith, our trust in God, remains undiminished.

False Hope

All too many Christians have a false expectation of divine healing. We all die! And none of us knows when that time may come. It may be through creeping old age or by accident or by sudden or prolonged illness. Perfect health for all awaits our resurrection!

Yet we all fight the decay. We eat sensibly, avoid noxious substances, bind up wounds, extract rotten teeth, surgically set broken bones, maybe even permit a paramedic to resuscitate us... So where is the line between faith and works? Christians can't have one without the other.

Healing is an act of undeserved divine mercy. It is a sovereign act of God. In our day great miracles of healing have taken place. But very few. Most Christians with serious illness recover with or without medical treatment - or they die. Whatever the outcome, faith knows that God is with them, that He knows their every pain and every need, that in their suffering there is purpose. Indeed in our 'instant' age one of our greatest needs is to develop - patience. That's a quality that is hewn from suffering! Our faith sees us through every human situation. It is maintained and strengthened by paying careful attention to - and doing - the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

When illness strikes we do what God says: call for the elders and be anointed. That's placing the matter in God's hands - a public expression that we trust Him whatever befalls.

Then we do our part, confident that the outcome is in His hands!

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