

Healing of our Bodies • James 5:14-16

On February 23, 1996, Mary Clarke of Downers Grove, Illinois, was entering her fourth month of pregnancy. She wasn't feeling well—trouble breathing and very dizzy, so she went to see her doctor. During a routine part of her examination the nurse was unable to detect the baby's heartbeat. The doctor tried for ten or fifteen minutes but he could not hear the fetal heartbeat, either. He moved Mary to the ultrasound room where they tried again, but no sign of a heartbeat. Another physician was called in who also was unsuccessful after more than fifteen minutes of trying.

Mary's doctor told her and her husband Ron, "I'm sorry, but the baby has died. I can't tell you why, but these things happen. I'm very sorry but you will have to be induced."

Mary says, "Ron's heart and my heart were broken. We had lost our precious baby."

She was moved to the birth center. The procedure to induce was explained to her. She was further examined to determine why she was having trouble breathing. "As I was lying in bed," Mary said, "I prayed that God would watch over our child until we could meet him or her in heaven. My heart was broken, but I was filled with hope that I would one day see my child."

Meanwhile, Ron called Mary's sister to tell her what was happening. Mary's sister called Pat Bailey, a woman at her church, and asked her to pray. When Pat heard what was happening she said, "That baby's not dead. Tell them to double check. Get a second opinion."

Ron and Mary asked the physician to check one more time, just in case. He ordered another ultrasound. A different nurse was in the ultrasound room, one who didn't know all that had so far happened in Mary's case. She routinely announced, "... and there's the heartbeat."

"Are you sure the baby is okay?" Mary asked.

"The baby's heartbeat is perfect. No problems," the nurse answered.

The nurse from the birth center was amazed. The doctor was called in to check the monitor. "I can't believe it," he said. "If I had not seen this, I would not have believed it. This is not the same baby I saw on the other ultrasound." He later added, "I would like to give you an explanation for what happened, but I have none. A second doctor always verifies a diagnosis like this. But, there are times when medical science cannot explain everything. Sometimes the only explanation is that God intervened."

Mary says, "I did not need an explanation. I knew that God had performed a miracle, and that was all I needed to know."

On August 22, 1996, Jamie Andrew Clarke was born—a healthy baby boy.

More recent and closer to where we live is the story of Nathan Christensen of Necedah, Wisconsin. On April 17, 2000, he was involved in a near-fatal car accident. He apparently lost control of the family convertible while trying to avoid a deer. He laid there unattended for forty-five minutes until Kevin Lindow came by, found Nathan and used his medical emergency skills to stabilize Nathan's neck while Kevin's mother called for help. Upon arrival at the hospital

Nathan was diagnosed with a broken leg, spinal cord damage, a collapsed lung and numerous body lacerations. At the Marshfield clinic he was put into a drug-

induced coma for the next four days. His odds against survival were 100 to 1. When he did not come out of the coma as expected his father prayed for him. The next day he woke up—with a fracture to the C-4 vertebrae. He was in danger of at least partial, if not full, paralysis.

Wearing a device to protect his neck, Nathan Christiansen prayed every night for two weeks

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for God to heal him. He reports that one night when he was just lying in bed he sensed a popping in his neck. The next day x-rays were done that showed the vertebrae was fine. It was healed. Three months later he was cleared to resume participation in football, wrestling, track and field.

From ancient times to modern times, from the Bible to our own backyards, I believe God heals our bodies. But, it is always on his terms. God's terms are not always easy for us to figure out. Consider three very different Bible reports of divine healing.

Naaman was a general in the Syrian army. His story is told in II Kings 5. He was diagnosed with leprosy, a contagious and debilitating disease for which there was no known cure. It was a social and physical death sentence.

The Syrian army had captured a young girl as a prisoner-of-war from Israel and turned her into a slave girl who served Naaman's wife. The Jewish girl told her boss's husband that the God of Israel could cure him of leprosy. With a letter of introduction from the king of Syria to the king of Israel, Naaman went looking for healing. He was sent to the prophet Elisha who told him that God would cure him if he went and washed seven times in the Jordan River.

The general was offended and outraged. He insisted there were better, cleaner rivers back in Syria so he returned home. His servants asked him if he would have heeded the instructions if they were more difficult. That simple question motivated Naaman to return to Israel, wash seven times in the Jordan and be completely healed of his leprosy.

Naaman learned the most basic lesson of divine healing, that God sets the terms and we don't. God chooses whom he will heal, when he will heal and how he will heal. We do not tell God; God tells us.

Add to Naaman's story the story of King Hezekiah. His amazing story is in the Old Testament book of II Kings chapters 18-20. Hezekiah was a good and godly king who ruled the Hebrew people from the capital in Jerusalem. He was 39-years-old when he became desperately

ill. The prophet Isaiah came to his home and told him to get his house in order because he would soon die. King Hezekiah was deeply shaken. He turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly over his death sentence. Then Hezekiah begged God for more time—and God said yes. The Lord granted him a fifteen-year reprieve.

The king soon recovered and lived fifteen more years, dying at the age of 54 in the twenty-ninth year of his reign. This time there were no more extensions.

King Hezekiah learned the same lesson that General Naaman had learned. Healing is on God's terms. If God wants to grant an extension he decides how long. If God gives fifteen years and no more then that is the limit. God sets the terms, not us.

The third biblical story comes from Acts 3: 1-10:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement

at what had happened to him.

What is so interesting about this story is that God did not give him what he asked for. This unnamed man begging by the temple gate wanted money. God gave him health, instead. There is no mention of his faith. There is no record of his prayers, just that God healed him to show others what God can do. The disabled beggar learned the same lesson learned by General Naaman and King Hezekiah—God sets the terms. God heals whom he wants, when he wants and how he chooses.

God loves to be asked and he loves to heal.

Please do not take offense at this truth. If it were otherwise God would not be God. God has the wisdom, power and goodness to make the right choices. He sets the terms. I must trust him.

But God does want us to ask. After all, he is our Father and we are his children. Fathers love to be asked by their children, even if they have to say no. Naaman asked. Hezekiah asked. Hundreds of people in the Bible asked Jesus to heal their maladies, cure their children, give them sight or cleanse their skin. And he did it! God loves to be asked and he loves to heal.

Sometimes God says yes through the natural healing processes that he put into our bodies when he created us. Sometimes he says yes through the power of medicine or the skill of a surgeon. Sometimes he says yes through a direct supernatural intervention called a miracle. And, sometimes he says no. But we still are invited to ask. In James 5:14-15 in the New Testament we read:

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Don't get hung up on the elders and the oil. This was simply a method. It is a method we still practice today at Wooddale Church. When Wooddalers ask for elders and leaders of the church to anoint them and pray for healing that is what we do. But, it is not the oil that heals. It is not the elders that heal. It is not even the prayers that heal. God heals!

God heals—so we ask him. I ask him. I will tell you honestly that when I pray for people to be healed I do not normally say, “God, if it is your will,” although I certainly know that heal-

ing fully depends on God's will. I just ask. I ask God to heal. I ask, knowing that the answer may be no. It was no when Jesus asked not to die on the cross. It was no when St. Paul asked three times to be healed of his physical malady. But God still wants us to ask, so I ask him with the hope that God will say yes. When we are sick we have an opportunity and an invitation—just ask God!

With opportunity comes responsibility. That responsibility is faith! We come to God with trust and confidence in him. Just as we trust a surgeon when consenting to an operation, so we come to God with faith and trust that he will do the right thing when we pray for healing.

But, let's be clear on what is meant by faith and trust. It is not so much faith that we will be healed; it is trust in God. We truly believe that God can heal and that God will do what is good and right. Faith is in God, not the outcome. True faith trusts God regardless of the outcome. So we pray like the psalmist in Psalm 143:7-8:

Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.

Ask directly and specifically, but remember that healing is on God's terms and that true believers totally trust him no matter how he an-

swers. Trusting God is all about the person, not about the outcome.

The psalmist says in Psalm 103:2-3. “*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.*” Isn’t it interesting that the Bible often gives a double offer? So, what are your sins? God will forgive them through Jesus. What are all your diseases? What are the afflictions of your mind and body? Remember, “*Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases.*”

Ask God.

Totally trust him.

See the good things God will do.

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