

2. Gifts of Miracles and Healings

1Co 12:12-31 Mat 8:1-17

Last week: We saw that the whole of life is a gift

Our personality, natural aptitudes, experiences, our very selves, are a gift to the church and wider community.

Today we think about a couple of particular spiritual gifts that Paul mentions – Namely Miracles and Healings.

I don't know what sort of image the subject of healing and miracles conjures up for you?

The bogus faith healers in the Philippines?

The big evangelist style healing worship services, with people flocking to the front to be touched by God?

Or of individuals such as Paul and Silas moving from place to place laying hands on people?

Or perhaps of Jesus, raising the dead or walking on water.

When we talk of miracles we are usually thinking of things that are out of the ordinary.

But in a sense life itself is a miracle,

and the more we discover about nature and the bodies self-healing properties, the more we recognise the miraculous nature of creation.

From this we realise that we have to live responsibly.

To eat properly, exercise and stay healthy. Not to abuse our bodies and then look for a supernatural miracle to get well.

However, in Paul's list of gifts he seems to be thinking about supernatural intervention, where human and natural resources seem to have run out.

Let me make some general observations about miraculous healing:-

1. That like the other gifts, miracles and healings are for the building up of the body of Christ.
2. It as a sign which points to Christ and assists in adding to the numbers of believers as well.
3. The exceptional gift is not for everyone –
This means that it is not necessarily the ordained clergy who will be most effective in this area.
Though we should note that anyone may see a miracle or healing taking place in response to prayer.
4. Even those who have the gift will admit that sometimes people are not healed... and the reasons may be many.

a) May be sin

b) A spiritual blockage (where people have dabbled in new age or occult activities.)

c) A psychological problem where counselling is needed

+BI Two older men were talking about their health problems church. One said, "My new doctor doesn't just treat the symptoms, he treats both the mind and the body."

"Hmm," the second man grunted and thought for a moment; then he asked, "Does he give a discount if the mind is already gone?"

(Clarice Lukenbill, Spencer, Ind. Christian Reader, "Lite Fare.")

Another block to healing may be...

d) That subconsciously the person does not want to be healed

e) A lack of faith

(by the one who prays or the one being prayed for)

(remember that Jesus could do no mighty work in

Nazareth – because of their unbelief!.)

Healings and miracles do proclaim God's Kingdom and strengthen the faith of the faithful (Jesus' healings were a fulfilment of Isaiah – "I have come to bind up the broken-

hearted, to set at liberty the captives” etc)

But we also have to acknowledge that our society tends to be very sceptical of such things even when they see them – partly because we have become sceptical about everything! (Even 50 years ago people seemed to be much more open to believing in miracles – and yet today I still think that people are looking for something or someone they can rely on and trust in).

What I am saying is that miracles and healings do not help to convince people if they do not want to believe.
(Even the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were unconvinced)

A further reason why a miracle may not occur, or a person be healed is that...

c) It may simply not be God’s will at that time.

+ I knew of a very faithful lady, Stella, who died despite the many prayers offered on her behalf, yet she also lived much longer than expected, which was, I believe, in response to the prayers of God’s people.

As we pray that God will give us the gifts that he wants us to have we have to be careful with the gift of healings and miracles.

There are particular dangers to watch for.

- a) Thinking oneself more spiritual. Spiritual pride would be a great temptation with spectacular gifts.
- b) A church whose worship centres around healing, where people come to look for the spectacular, rather than Jesus himself (it was a problem in Jesus day – read John’s Gospel, chapter 5:26 onwards, following the feeding of the 5000).

Having said all that, it is a great asset to a church when someone has the gift.

There are those who will come to see, and will then hear the gospel.

While healings proclaim the Kingdom of God, and may help to bolster people’s faith.

It is also about compassion.

Jesus healed out of love for people as well – to alleviate suffering.

HOW DOES HEALING COME ABOUT?

If we follow Jesus through the Gospels there is no particular formula...

Jesus healed by a word, from a distance

By laying hands on people

By using spit (!)

By asking a man to wash in a pool

Faith must come into the equation too.

Jesus often said, “Your faith has made you well”

And this raises the question – “How much faith do you need?”

How do we measure faith?

Faith is the conviction that God will act.

but we cannot manufacture feelings of faith

Faith grows through relationship

(Think of how you develop trust of another human being – you get to know the person)

But when it boils down, faith is demonstrated in the Gospels
by the very act of going to Jesus for healing.

Now, there are also some general instructions for healing in a church situation...

- a) James 5 talks about the earnest prayer of faith.

¹⁴*Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore confess your sins to one another,*

and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. ¹⁷Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. ¹⁸Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

b) The more who pray, the better. (This is not to say that God doesn't listen to individuals, but when a group prays it would seem that there is a unity of purpose in the Spirit)

c) Prayer and fasting seem to go together

(ref. Jesus admonished the disciples trying to cast out spirits – “this kind only comes out by prayer and fasting”)

The special gift of faith to believe miracles and healing is received...

a) By asking

b) By praying and seeking God's will

c) By doing it -- beginning to pray for people

The use of any gift may take some time to exercise wisely, well and effectively. (Just like a child coordinating its muscles and nervous system in order to walk)

d) Through a life of prayer

God may give you the gift to share and build up Christians

But you may also have been the recipient of healing or some other miracle.

If so, that is also a gift to be shared, not from pride in oneself, but pride in God who is so very good to us.

A Prayer:-

Father, we come to you as fallible human beings,

but we present ourselves to you, for your service and glory.

Forgive us our sins and fill us with your Holy Spirit. Endow us with the gifts that you have for us, so that we may be strengthened in our faith,

and be a light to our community, that others may be drawn to your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Grow in us the fruit of the Spirit, that we may exercise our gifts with confidence, love, wisdom and true humility, so that your name may be glorified above all others. Amen.