

God's Will for Physical Healing

"Lord, please heal our sister if it is Your will." How often have we heard an earnest prayer such as this or even offered one ourselves? Do we struggle with the last part, "If it is Your will?" Why do we pray this way?

Some teach that healing is always God's will. They point out that Jesus never turned away anyone who came in faith seeking healing. Is such teaching Scriptural?

When we intercede for someone's spiritual healing, we do not pray, "If it is Your will." Instead, we trust that spiritual healing is always God's will, and all that stands in the way is human will because God gives man a choice. But we often wonder about God's will for physical healing, which is the focus of this article.

We will also focus mostly on healing for the faithful rather than the unbeliever because we tend to wrestle with the question, "Why doesn't God heal His children?"

As we look at truths in God's Word, we will expose some false concepts and teachings on this subject.

Mankind, not God, is to blame for sickness and pain.

God pronounced His original creation very good. There was no need for healing. Adam never needed antacids or a bandage, or an appendectomy. Eve never needed a pain pill, antibiotics, or a cast for a broken arm.

However, the sin of Adam and Eve brought a curse on them and the earth. Further, it made them mortal; their bodies were destined to return to dust (Gen 3:16-19).

God's will is not for man to live forever in his fallen body.

After Adam and Eve became mortal, God expelled them from the Garden of Eden and guarded the way to the tree of life to prevent them from eating its fruit and living forever (Gen 3:22-24). This was an act of justice. Man by sin had forfeited his right to eternal life.

But it was also an act of mercy. Rather than leaving man forever trapped in a fallen body, God gave him an opportunity by redemption to receive a restored, immortal body in the future.

God's long-term plan for His children's physical healing is to give them new bodies.

Spiritual healing is God's priority. Even before pronouncing the curse on mankind, He promised the Redeemer (Gen 3:15). He made blood atonement available to Adam and Eve and every sinner who lived on this planet ever since. Our "once for all" Sacrifice, the Lamb of God, takes away our sins and makes us new creatures.

But restoration of the body is yet future. Along with the whole creation, we groan, awaiting the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:22-23). We long for our Lord Jesus to come from heaven and change our vile body so it will be like His glorious body (Php 3:20-21). At the last trump, we shall all be changed from mortality to immortality (1Co 15:51-54).

Adding this point to the previous one, we may draw some conclusions: God's will is to heal all His children physically, but not always in this life. Healing in this life is temporary; healing in the life to come is permanent.

Does not this refute the claim that having sufficient faith will always bring healing? What need would there be for a resurrected body if faith could bring healing to every affliction?

Jesus understands and cares about our physical suffering.

Our great High Priest, Jesus the Son of God, is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin (Heb 4:14-15). From the Gospels, we know He was weary and hungry; this verse suggests He knew sickness, too. Finally, He endured extreme injury and pain in His Passion. So, we know He understands our suffering, and He is touched and feels with us.

Jesus' earthly ministry abundantly demonstrates His compassion on both spiritual and physical needs. One example is in Matthew 8:16-17, And he cast out the spirits with his

word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses. Still today, He takes our spiritual and physical sicknesses on His shoulders.

Jesus has power to heal.

Over and over, Jesus illustrated this in His miracles of healing. The power of the Lord was present to heal them (Luke 5:17).

The centurion (Luke 7:1-10) understood that when someone has enough authority, all he must do to make something happen is speak a word; and further, that Jesus has such authority over sickness. In this account, the servant was near death, but in the next account (Luke 7:11-18), Jesus healed a man who had already died, demonstrating His authority over death as well.

As Creator of the universe, including our bodies, Jesus can certainly restore health and life – He made them in the first place. One writer pointed out that Jesus' miracles on earth were local demonstrations of what He does globally, through the laws of nature, every day. For example, He causes the grapevine to draw water through its roots and form grapes, turning water into wine. He grows wheat on the earth and multiplies fish in the sea to feed multitudes all the time. He heals the just and the unjust repeatedly all over the world.

Jesus wants to heal.

We already noticed that He cares. We also see that He acts on His care. And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick (Matt 14:14).

When a leper implored Him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean, Jesus, moved with compassion, answered, I will; be thou clean, and instantly healed him (Mark 1:40-42).

From these last three points, we can understand that when Jesus does not heal us physically right now, it does not mean He doesn't understand or doesn't care, or isn't able, or doesn't want to. Likewise, it does not necessarily mean we lack faith; as we have seen, believers and unbelievers all have mortal bodies.

It does mean He has a good reason not to heal us now. We will save this thought for later.

God heals in various ways, and the glory belongs to Him.

God is the Healer (Psalm 103:3) but can work through various agents.

First, He made our bodies with the ability to heal. Our white blood cells destroy germs; our blood clots to keep us from bleeding to death. Skin heals; bones knit. Of course, these systems are imperfect and do not always work, but we see God's amazing goodness shining through even our sin-cursed bodies.

He also uses doctors and medicine. The Bible has some negative references to physicians and some favorable ones. Luke was the beloved physician (Col 4:14). Jesus identified Himself as a Physician (Mark 2:17). In the Bible, we do not see the teaching that faith means avoiding doctors.

We do read a warning against seeking physicians rather than God. *And Asa ... was diseased in his feet, until his disease was exceeding great: yet in his disease, he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians* (2Ch 16:12). Asa's fault was not necessarily in seeking physicians but in not seeking the Lord. Let us not put our faith in the medical field but in God, and remember to thank Him for healing, even when He does work through physicians.

Sometimes He performs a miracle and heals supernaturally. Many saints today can testify of seeing or experiencing this.

Regardless of what avenue God uses, the glory belongs to Him. When the healing of a lame man drew an admiring crowd, Peter told the people not to credit him but Jesus Christ (Acts 3:12-16). How unlike the many miracle healers today who seek fame for themselves!

God gives us a part in prevention and healing.

God gave the Israelites commandments for prevention. *If thou wilt diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord thy God, and wilt do that which is right in his sight, and wilt give ear to his commandments, and keep all his statutes, I will put none of these*

diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians: for I am the Lord that healeth thee (Ex 15:26).

Even in miraculous healing, God often gave man a part. Elisha told Naaman to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Jesus put clay on a blind man's eyes and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. He told ten lepers to show themselves to the priests. He told a palsied man and an impotent man to take up his bed and walk. Peter and John told the lame man to rise and walk.

What is our role in prevention and healing? First, we are responsible to be good stewards of our bodies. Avoid drunkenness and overeating. Eat right. Get enough exercise. Get enough sleep. Cultivate safe habits.

Our part is also to exercise faith. Jesus repeatedly stated that His acts of healing were according to the recipients' faith. He could do few mighty works among His own countrymen when they refused to believe in Him (Matt 13:58; Mark 6:5-6).

When our faith is in God, prayer will be our first response in affliction (James 5:13). We will pray for healing according to His will, knowing He wants to heal us but at the time of His choosing.

We may also call for anointing with oil (James 5:14-18). Through this avenue, God has poured out spiritual and physical blessings on countless saints who have availed themselves of it.

There is also a right time and way to seek medical help, as we have seen.

God expects us to wrestle with the curse.

When God cursed the ground because of Adam's sin, He said it would produce thorns and thistles, and Adam would need to sweat for his bread and eat it in sorrow. God sent Adam out of Eden to till the ground (Gen 3:17-19, 23).

Work was not new. Before Adam sinned, God put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it (Gen 2:15). What was new was sorrow, which included a battle. Tilling the ground was now a battle with thorns and thistles.

God did not give Adam a magic cure for thorns and thistles. Neither did God want Adam to give up and starve because he had no cure. Instead, He told him to sweat and to till the ground for his bread. God wanted him to use the resources He gave – mental and physical – to battle the curse.

Six thousand years later, the battle goes on. Man has made much progress in weed control, with tilling, herbicides, genetically modified crops, and so on, significantly increasing food production.

But man is still limited by the curse. Often a solution brings more problems. For example, herbicides may kill beneficial species and promote resistant weeds. There is still no cure for thorns and thistles, and never will be on this old earth. We will have to wrestle with the curse until God creates the new earth.

We may apply this Scriptural concept – that God expects us to wrestle with the curse – to the curse of sickness, too. This gives balance against false concepts at both extremes. At one extreme is the idea that since God gave Adam and Eve everything they needed in the Garden, we can cure all our health problems by eating right and using only natural remedies.

This idea includes elements of truth. Eating right would solve many health problems. God expects us to eat right. Also (without debating the definition of “natural”), the more natural products are often better, sometimes much better, than the more artificial ones. However, this concept ignores the truth that we are not in the Garden of Eden but in a sin-cursed world. Moreover, natural is not always good; some natural things can kill us. And eating too much of even a good thing can be harmful; for example, Scripture warns us against eating too much honey.

Man must sort out what is fit to eat and what is not. He must wrestle with the curse. Even if he eats right and does everything right, he will still get sick and eventually die. He must keep struggling and developing remedies, just as he struggles with weeds. As with weed control, God expects man to use his resources to wage this battle.

At the other extreme is the claim that man will keep improving medicine until all our health problems are solved.

Man has indeed made great strides in medicine, as with weed control. We are blessed and thank God for these benefits.

But people still often have the experience of the woman who had suffered many things of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse (Mark 5:26). Even with all the modern medicine available, sometimes doctors cannot fix the problem. Sometimes they cannot even find it.

As with weed control, often a medical solution fails or brings other problems. Medicines have side effects. Surgery has complications. Antibiotic overuse promotes resistant germs.

It will always be this way on this sin-cursed earth. And these bodies will still be mortal, no matter how much science accomplishes. Only God can give us new bodies.

We avoid these extremes – rejecting man’s part or putting our faith in it – by remembering that God expects us to wrestle with the curse.

God has set moral boundaries around our quest for health.

Without God, man often seeks healing from false gods through means such as idol worship, witchcraft, and New Age practices.

Man also seeks to make himself a god. Despite all its blessings, modern medicine has opened a moral can of worms. Efforts to modify human DNA are tampering with God’s blueprint for human life. In pursuit of eliminating defective traits such as genetic diseases, unborn lives are discarded in laboratory experiments or destroyed in abortion clinics. When man’s battle with the curse crosses God’s moral boundaries, it only brings an added curse.

God’s words to Isaiah are freshly relevant: *Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! ... Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth?* (Isa 45:9-10).

In grappling with terminal illnesses, man is also seeking sovereignty over death. On the one hand is assisted suicide, which is legal in a growing number of states and countries.

On the other hand, and closer home, extreme medical measures are taken to prolong life at any cost. It may not be easy, but there comes a time when the child of God will say, like Jacob, Now let me die.

Physical healing is not always immediate, even for the child of God.

Paul wrote that his coworker Epaphroditus had been sick, near to death. God did heal him, but apparently, it took a while (Php 2:25-27). Was this because he lacked faith?

Paul told Timothy to use *a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities* (1Ti 5:23). So why didn't Paul just touch a handkerchief and send it to Timothy to cure him?

Paul left Trophimus sick at Miletum (2Ti 4:20). So why didn't Paul lay hands on him and heal him?

The Bible gives no indication that these Christians lacked faith. As we saw, Jesus can heal and wants to, so it is for good reason if He delays healing. What could those reasons be?

God in His Word lists many purposes for letting His children suffer trials. We will notice two of the reasons He may delay physical healing.

When God delays healing His child, it is to show His strength in weakness.

Paul's thorn was "in the flesh," a physical problem (2Co 12:7-10). Though he prayed earnestly and in faith, healing was delayed, possibly until he received his new body. The Lord's purpose was to keep him humble and weak so that Christ could show His power more abundantly through him.

His promise to us is the same: *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness* (2Co 12:9). When this is His answer to our pleas for healing, can we glory in our infirmities and let Him show His strength in our weakness?

When God delays healing His child, it is for His glory.

When His disciples asked who sinned to cause a man to be born blind, Jesus answered, *Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him* (John 9:3).

In this case, the man's blindness was to give Jesus the opportunity to show God's glory. Because the man had suffered all his life, the miracle was more dramatic to everybody who knew he was born blind.

It seems Jesus healed this man as soon as He encountered the need. This was often the case. But let us look at an exception.

When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, He stated that the sickness was for God's glory. But He delayed (John 11:1-6). When He finally arrived, Lazarus had already been dead four days.

Like us, Martha struggled to understand Jesus' delay. *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died* (John 11:21). Unlike the centurion, she did not seem to understand that Jesus could have healed Lazarus without even coming. Also, she did not yet understand that He would do something even greater because He is the resurrection and the life.

Mary greeted Jesus with the same lament as her sister Martha. When Jesus saw her and the other mourners weeping, He Himself wept. Even while He had a good reason for His delay and knew what God would do, He still felt the pain of the people suffering through the delay.

Still today, He feels our grief when we cry with the anguish of Martha and Mary: "Lord, where were You?" or even, "Lord, where are You?"

After Jesus raised Lazarus to life, many believed (John 11:45), fulfilling His stated purpose for waiting (v15). As a result, God was glorified in a greater way, and faith was stimulated more, because of the delay.

Lazarus' resurrection was temporary; he would die again sometime before receiving his new body. But his story illustrates how God often works. He may delay healing His child

to receive even greater glory and call others to believe. No doubt, most of us can think of saints whose testimony in suffering has moved us heavenward.

In the end, God will receive greater glory at the resurrection, when He gives us new bodies, than He received by all the physical healings He gave us in this life. In the meantime, He also receives glory here while His children faithfully endure delays in healing.

Revelation 22:2-3 describes the ultimate healing when there will be no more curse, and man will enjoy the tree of life, from which he was barred in Eden, and live forever with his Maker and Healer. So let us be ready for that day, and until then, let God receive glory from our lives in sickness and in health.

~Clair Auker