

Hindrances To Healing

Chapter Headings

1. Healing According to Me
2. Healing According to God
3. Ignorance is Not Bliss
4. A Fate Worse than Ignorance
5. When Heaven is Silent
6. When Heaven Speaks
7. Heaven too Soon

On my own admission, this book is lightweight when considering the healing power of Jesus and studying the scriptural record. It does begin benignly but there are a few stings along the way.

An in-depth perusal can be had from more scholarly efforts such as the following- 'None of These Diseases' by S.I.McMillen - published by Marshall Morgan & Scott, which gives testimony to the wisdom of the Bible for the key to healthy living.

Introduction

Divine healing is a miracle and a wonder! It is part of the new agreement that Jesus Christ brought with him when he came into the world.

We know from the New Testament that he continually confirmed his message of redemption and deliverance by the signs that he did.

In the Old Testament of the Bible these things pointed to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. When he came, what he did was partly to lead to faith in himself and it included healing and releasing from demon power as well as raising the dead. The miracles spread his fame and made people aware that he was actually there.

After his death and resurrection we find the same signs followed the preaching of the same message by His disciples, also confirming all that they said.

Although healing is not given on demand but as He wishes, God does reveal Himself through this way as well as through His word. His word and His works go together.

Sometimes though, there are hindrances. To go a long way toward complete and lasting healing, these checks and obstructions can be removed either by the one needing them removed or by another coming to help.

This makes a way for God Himself to do His own work in the spirit, soul and body of His people.

The Lord Jesus, therefore, is central to this book.

It is not about alternative medicine. It is not about trying new techniques when the old ones don't work! If we are not healed, it is not the intention here to introduce ideas of surrendering to massage or meditation, therapy of any kind or to have anything to do with realising auras or the power within waiting to be exploited.

We will have to see to it, or try to, that God is not mocked by our supposed cleverness. There are false cult ideas and other religious notions of men that we read in much up-to-date writing where there is a passing acknowledgement of Jesus. We cannot, however, take what we want and leave the rest as irrelevant. He is the Resurrection and the Life and for the purpose of this book He is the Healer.

The hindrances to our health may not be insurmountable as long as we remember what to be aware of and what to avoid. There may be some good in some, but ultimately the spirit is tarnished and in many cases the life is ruined by following such ideas. Neither do we link ourselves here, with mother earth, so called, or universal energy. We are not seeking ideas that may have some smattering of truth.

We know the One who said, 'I am the Truth.' John 14.6 tells us that Jesus said, in answer to the question from Thomas as to how they could know the way, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.'

.It will be satisfying if those who read or skim through these chapters (that are in no way conclusive) and who long for healing or better still, to be made whole, will see themselves as not after the good but after the excellent.

The full healing program will be complete with the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that to reign.

Chapter One Healing According to Me

News that the body of a new born baby girl had been found washed up by the bank of a river saddened the local community. The police were in charge and everyone knew that all that could be done, would be done, to find the mother and solve the mystery.

The task was likely to be impossible, however, and in the end the little body would be placed in a pauper's grave; easily forgotten and without a name.

The people of this particular community in the West Country cared. They could not bear the thought of this happening. The landlady of the public house, a mother of three, and all her regulars, began to collect small amounts of money and a tin was placed on the counter.

Night after night contributions were made so that a proper grave and memorial could be paid for. People collected at work and the police gave too. Many added notes and cheques. The coroner eventually recorded an open verdict and said that it was not known how the baby had died and it would probably always remain a mystery. By this time, however, the small community had made sure of a tiny grave and when the money was counted it was more than adequate. 'Everyone was entitled to proper burial,' they said.

A white marble headstone was ordered in the shape of an open book. It would be inscribed with the words

'I never lived, I never died, yet for me,
some people cried.'

The funeral was arranged by the pub community and more than thirty people took time off work, including local councillors and police officers, to attend.

'She belongs to us and is now part of a family,' they said.

At the funeral the vicar led the graveside service with the words;

'Suffer the little children to come
unto Me, for such is the Kingdom of Heaven.'

This was a true story recorded in a daily newspaper. What a testimony to some of the best that humanity can offer!

Those who attended the funeral wept openly. They cared and they became involved

We could ask ourselves whether it is possible for us to be actively involved in compassionate caring in our own community and further afield, as far as God takes us, when we ourselves are sick?

All of us, our neighbours, our friends, the particular circle we move in, not to mention the rest of the town and group we meet with for worship, all need some form of healing. So we could almost say, 'no involvement, no healing.'

'All seek their own,' said Paul to the Philippians in chapter two v.21, so that 'all' must include us, too.

It certainly includes me. I am almost totally self-interested when I am sick. I find myself complacent in the extreme, about others and concentrating on my own narrow welfare.

'You don't know how I feel!'

Paul said Epaphroditus was so sick he was dying, (Phil 2.27) simply because he had been fully engrossed in serving others. God did heal him, partly for Paul's sake but he had completely disregarded his own life in the risks he took.

This is the heart message of the Bible. If we try to save our lives, cosset our emotions, look to our own interests, we lose them; if we give them away, we save

them. If I want to be like God's Son, I need a heart full of compassion for the world, the whole of it and all humanity in it. God intends that the healing for this poor world of our should come through us.

The whole of Christ's ministry was healing orientated as it was with the emerging church.. If it wasn't, over 700 references to it in the New Testament would have to be crossed out. The authority for it was given to the twelve Apostles, in Mark 6.7 where it says 'and He called unto Him the twelve and began to send them forth . . . And they cast out many devils and anointed with oil many that were sick'. Very comprehensive. Subsequently, He appointed seventy others to go where He was intending to follow. They were to heal the sick wherever they found themselves. They came back elated. 'and they healed them' the scriptures report.

The church as we know it now has the same work to do. It should be our normal activity. The gospel, when it is preached in the third world, is automatically attended by rebuking of spirits of infirmity and many healings.

A recent survey in this country (Britain) showed that 90% of people expected from their doctor, sympathy, kindness, understanding, a listening ear and at the end of the list, medical knowledge. And the scriptures are full of a variety of ways in which God's loving compassion is shown like this.

Hebrews 11.25 tells us that Moses, when he had the world at his feet, 'chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God.'

Timothy endured all things for the elect's sake (you and me) even to being treated as an evildoer. (2 Tim.2.10)

The bearing of each other's burdens fulfils the law of Christ. 'Share each other's troubles, and so obey the Lord's commands.' (Gal.6.2)

If you want a ministry, here it is, that of refreshing and encouraging one another.

'Your kindness has so often refreshed the hearts of God's people,' says Paul to Philemon verse 7 .

There is also import we can give here to the matter of touch.

This is compassion at the fingertips. It goes along with healing of spirit, soul and body. It puts backbone into the words we speak. We don't need to be afraid of it. We all ought to know what it is like to be hugged when catastrophe or grief overtakes us. Loving care is tangible.

'If I may but touch His clothes,' said the dear woman who had suffered so much from the professionals and received nothing. (Mark 5.28)

Elisha sensed the immediate need of extreme close contact for a dead child, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, hands to hands in 2 Kings 4:34

Then he did it again. What a man to be around in an emergency.

Isaiah tells us in chapter 58, that if we are looking for our 'own health to spring forth speedily' we are also automatically, to be found helping others in trouble, sharing our food, bringing right into our own homes those who are helpless. This is going a long way with inroads into our natural reserve and dignified silences. He is talking about an attitude that is expected when we are crying for our own relief. Don't hide from relations, he says, or your own flesh and blood when they have a need.

Jesus constantly touched people in the process of healing, no matter what the sight of the running sores did to others. There is no place for squeamishness. He put mud on eyes mixed with his own spittle. In John's Gospel chapter 9 and verse 6 it says, 'He spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the eyes of the blind man.' You can't get much closer than that.

The open places on disease ridden bodies, for example, leprosy, are as objectionable now as they must have been then. The smell alone is not conducive to drawing near. Even other people's normal perspiration is inhibitive. But Jesus drew near. He didn't wait for the apothecary to go around spraying perfumes as we might. .

Matthew 8.3 tells us of a man with the loathsome disease of leprosy, 'Jesus put forth His hand and touched him,' and the word there, Haptomai. includes the thought of holding and embracing.

The good Samaritan, you remember, came where the wounded one was and bound up the wounds, pouring in oil and wine and took care of him. Not only that but he paid for it all, plus the hotel bill. He went on caring even when it became costly.

Praying for one another is also a necessary extension of the caring process.

'Confess your faults one to another, and pray for one another
That you may be healed. James 5.16

Psalm 139 is a wonderful example of a prayer that can be used for someone else, changing it from being personal to using the name of the one who needs compassion. With all their complex personality it will make a difference to your eyesight as you look at them again.

To accept God's concept of another human being, makes our longing for their healing more important than our own feelings and our own needs. It wonderfully increases our faith and hope on all levels.

The following is a paraphrase in part of Psalm 139

'You made all the delicate inner parts of his body, and knit them together in his mother's womb.

Thank you for making him so wonderfully complex. It is amazing to think about. Your workmanship is marvellous. You were there when he was formed in utter

seclusion. You saw him before he was born and scheduled each day of his life before he began to breathe.

Every day was recorded in Your book.

If he ascends up into heaven you are there. If he makes his bed in hell, behold, you are there. The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.'

Think of it for those involved in abuse of any kind; those facing extreme depression every day contemplating suicide. The darkness and the light are both alike to a God who cares. How about those facing death or the death of a loved one?

This may all sound like a superficial beginning when thinking of the reasons why we are not healed. It may seem like a veneer or a panacea. But it is definitely a beginning.

Chapter Two. Healing According to God

In spite of chapter one, God, Himself, will do the healing. Not arbitrarily with caprice or by inconsistent whim, but how and when He will.

His plan for all of us is that we emerge from the chrysalis to be like a butterfly, not flitting here and there! but complete and beautiful, unique and free.

Even, let me say it gently, even if we sit in a wheelchair. You will know the story of Joni.

She was a vitally alive young woman who dived one day into the sea as she was used to doing but this time hit the sandy bottom and broke her neck. Unable to do anything for herself she has since influenced for God thousands of her own generation in similar circumstances. At the beginning she pleaded with God to let her die but before He could do anything in her life, even allow her to die, she had to hear what He wanted to say.

Ask yourself why you would want to be healed or made whole and yet not want also to know Him better. To hear His voice, to see His side of things, even if you are very sick, this may be a quick route to complete healing.

Sometimes it takes the stark reality of pain and dark days for God to get through to us with the things that are on His heart.

Did you know He just may want you to realise how much He loves you? How much He wants fellowship with you?

As Hosea says in 6.1 - 'He has smitten and He will heal.

He has torn and He will bind us up.'

He did it on purpose just to get you close enough and still enough for Him to speak, knowing you would then listen. Don't let us have no word from God about our

condition when we really need it simply because we had no desire for it when we didn't need it so badly. That would be a tragedy.

'Forget not my law; let your heart keep my commandments:
for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they
add to thee.' Proverbs 3: 1,2.

How precious has it been in the past to spend time with our heavenly Father and to hear what He has to say on any given situation?

Mary, dying of cancer at forty years of age, wanted only one thing and that was to hear the scriptures read to her. She brightened visibly when she was conscious enough to hear even a sentence or two. It had to be the real thing then or nothing but it was also her lifelong habit. Her family and friends understood completely her disenchantment with small talk.

All who came near the bed had to be prepared to quote or read something God had laid on their hearts. 'Blessed is the man that endures trial; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life.' James 1.12 was a particular verse that meant a great deal to her. Her lifetime love of the Lord and His word was seen by the staff and everyone who visited the ward.

The nurses and doctors were frankly amazed at the peace of mind she had and her quiet acceptance of great pain. It was as though her spirit dominated everything else and it was God, through His word, speaking to that spirit within, who could take away every vestige of anxiety and fear of dying. She would just wake up one day in His presence like a child would wake in his father's arms.

If we did know how much longer we had on earth, awake and clear-headed, or if we thought we might enter heaven fairly soon, we just might suddenly want to absorb more of the scriptures then. We might want to be aware of our reception to start with and what it was like up there.

It is a sad fact, so the World Cancer Research Fund tell us, that one in every three people in Britain will suffer some form of cancer in their lifetime. If their statistics are true it is also a fact that fifty percent of those who do, will die within five years.

But we are talking about healing and heaven's perspective. And the following is also a fact. God delights in reconstructing lives that have almost been demolished. He is in the business of restoring broken-down-everything! He is expert in turning what is damaged and useless into something healed and lovely.

He will make a broken life into a life of purpose. He is doing it all the time. There is balm and healing from God without price and He is ready and willing to bring a new beginning out of an apparent failure. This is not man's statistics. It is the truth we will find in the scriptures.

It is very often within God's plan, however, to bring resurrection life when life seems at an end. To come through our own particular fire and live again in joy and freedom may be down here or we might walk right through into His presence with joy

and freedom and a new body into the bargain. But, either way out of the deathlike experience, we will be unscathed. Daniel and his friends came out of the fire without even a smell of burning. The story in Daniel 3.27 does tell of them falling down but then they were seen walking and loose with no hurt and more still that the Son of God was seen walking with them.

The glory of the risen Lord Jesus Christ can be revealed in these helpless mortal bodies of ours. Suffering with God and under His hand, waiting for His perfectly timed deliverance out of it all, will, one day, make it all worthwhile. It then ceases to become a waste of time. Ill health no longer seems a miserable and devastating interruption to real living.

We are sometimes too impatient with God. He wants to work through our weaknesses to show His strength so that no-one can have any credit but Himself.

Thank God Jesus was a real man as well as divine, the second Person of the Trinity so that He became familiar from the inside, so to speak, with all that we have to bear. And, of course, He ultimately experienced death of His own will and volition as well as in His Father's purpose.

'Made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death . . . that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.' Hebrews 2.9

My sin and sickness preventing me being the perfect person He created me to be were borne by our Lord Jesus on the cross.

'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was on Him; and with His stripes we are healed.
Isa 53.3

When we appropriate all this for ourselves and personally accept His son's sacrifice for our own sin; not just agree to it or support it as a good idea for others then we can also make the claims of His word our own, applying them to our need and expecting them to work.

If we have no realisation of what the cross means and no sight of the Lord Jesus Christ taking our place on that cross, we will find it difficult to understand that our particular sickness is now on Him and He has dealt with it.

Perhaps we could make the following prayer our own at this point and find complete and immediate release.

'Lord Jesus Christ, I believe you died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. You redeemed me by your blood and I belong to you. I confess all my sins, known and unknown, and renounce them. Forgive me as you promise in your word (1 John 1.9) 'If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

Thank you, Lord for the blood of Jesus which cleanses me from all my sin. I come to you now as Healer and Deliverer. You know my particular need and what binds me.

I now renounce Satan and all his works and claim your promise that all who call upon the Name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2.21)

I thank You. Amen.

To have a knowledge of the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus by personal experience will far outweigh any mere physical healing we may desire but we now know that Christ is alive and at work by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Teaching the Israelites about the work of the cross and its relationship to healing, began right at the beginning of their exodus experience. His dealings with them in Egypt with Pharaoh and the plagues would culminate in the Passover. They learnt by the blood being applied to the lintels and the provision of a sacrifice that there was a protective covering for them. It was a vivid picture of God's redemption. As soon as they were released from Egypt the picture turned into an experience of the cross again when they came face to face with three days journey into the wilderness and no water to drink. The extreme trial, right in the path of the Lord's leading was a pool which was very bitter. Once the tree as a symbol of the cross was thrown into the waters they immediately became sweet.

God explained in detail, after this experience, that if they would do all He told them and all that He felt was right, then He would put none of the diseases upon them that He had brought on the Egyptians - plagues of all kinds, including death.

In their simple obedience, they had a miraculously added extra. They began to know God Himself in greater depth by one of His great names, Jehovah-Rapha, 'I am the Lord that heals you'. Incidentally, after all this and it must have caused the worst kind of panic in such a hot and dusty country, they found themselves camped by such an over-abundance of pure water they had more than they could possibly need. Exodus 15:23 to 27

I'm not suggesting that it is necessary for all of us to become ill to know God in any deeper way although He does want desperately to bring us into a greater understanding of His loving, giving nature. Nevertheless, the cross is the vital and first answer to draw and woo us to come closer.

All through the Old Testament the cross of Christ was anticipated.

'I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore
choose life, that both you and your seed may live.' Deut.30.19

Obedience was the criteria but it is obvious that there is a choice. We can choose death deliberately.

Lack of repentance can bring. The people were called to humble themselves so that God would not destroy them. If they sought God with the whole heart and put away their idols; God would repent and change His mind and heal them. He wanted to do it. Paul was in no doubt about the why of suffering.

‘Though they had the sentence of death in themselves, it was so that they would not trust in themselves but in God who actually raises the dead.’ 2 Cor.1.9
In the same passage he describes the sufferings and trials as almost a necessary part of the Christian's life so that the same consolation received from the Lord could be given to others. He almost turns the whole thing into a blessing!
And there is no doubt that many have found the words of Peter to be relevant in their own darkness and deep trials of faith.

‘Since Christ suffered and underwent pain,’ he says, ‘we must be ready to suffer also.’

When the body suffers, sin loses its power. 1 Pet.4.1

We become concerned with eternity. We are, therefore, not to be surprised at it. Instead, we ought really to be glad if possible! These very trials will make us partners with Christ.

One day we will share His glory when He comes again and while we are down here we will more and more be seen to be like our Lord. That must be good.

Jenny was twelve years old. She had quite purposefully put the call of God out of her mind. At a certain evening service she was vaguely listening to her pastor and suddenly she heard! She thought God was speaking to people like her sister who was all taken up with youth groups and church and all that kind of thing anyway. However, she found the Lord persisting to speak but she still didn't want to respond. She wanted to do so much with her life and run it her own way so she didn't go forward at church or raise her hand or any of the other accepted ways of acknowledging the need of Christ Jesus as her Saviour and Lord of her life.

One day, however, she just sat down and wrote it down all that she felt God was doing and saying to her. It wasn't easy, but she described her simple acceptance of His claims on her and then had it all included in the church magazine. It became very public after all. The explanation of how she wanted to put it off was no longer acceptable to her peace of mind. It was quite a testimony to some of the older members of the congregation who had sat solidly for years without any public acknowledgement of their faith.

‘Now is the day of salvation,’ Paul said. ‘Now is the accepted time.’

This has saved Jenny from much dis-ease and heartache in years to come and she will also be able to commit her sufferings to Him as they arise.

Leonard Stacey had also put off the desire as well as the voice of God when God called him to go abroad as a missionary. His father's business in the West Country was flourishing and he was invited to help as a salesman. The guilt he felt in his heart through the years from the time he accepted this lucrative position was still troubling him forty years later.

He started a Sunday School and then a new church was built with the help of his wife and neighbourhood Christians. This still did not stifle the agonising feeling of not quite having done what God wanted. All the activities did nothing to fulfil the interpretation of God's word when he was young and full of desire to please his Lord. So at seventy years of age he confessed all his mistakes and failings and humbly accepted forgiveness and then found that there actually had been no second causes. It had all been of God; He had been working out His purposes in spite of everything. In these later years, however, Leonard Stacey contributed his angina in part, to some of these unresolved anxieties.

Chapter Three Ignorance is Not Bliss

Unenlightenment or simple neglect of the things that hinder our healing does not become us as Christians. Healthy, intelligent vitality adorns the gospel of Christ. Unwittingly we may have over looked some of the following: .

Failure to pay a ransom

When Israel was young, God instructed Moses that every man over the age of twenty, when counted, was to pay the ransom money. This was half a shekal or something like half a dollar. It was to be offered to the Lord. No-one rich could pay more and no-one was to pay less. This made silver, in the scriptures, as a type of our redemption. It was provided to make atonement for their souls, making amends for their sin, individually. It would deliver them, when they were numbered, from all plague. (Exodus 30.12-16) Plague in the dictionary is described as fatal epidemic disease, something like the bubonic plague which London suffered in 1665 with an infestation of pests. Was this one of the reasons David received for the people just such a pestilence when he mistakenly numbered the people?

I thank the Lord Jesus Christ that He has already paid the ransom for me with His death and there is no need to fear when I am counted and no need to count the money. What money could I possibly pay for the ransom of my own soul? Mark chapter eight says 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'

This fact of my ransom is present before God for all time. The soul is priceless.

Backsliding

Backsliding is described in Deuteronomy 29.16-20 and is obviously very abhorrent to God and having deliberately turned our back on Him then all His curses take the place of the blessings.

‘I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and keep His commandments . . . That you may live and multiply . . . But if you turn away so that you will not hear, but be drawn away and worship other gods, . . . You shall not prolong your days . . .’ Man says to himself, ‘I shall have peace although I walk in the imagination of my heart, but it doesn’t turn out like that’

Troubling Words

Some of our words do spring from a very troubled mind but, says Proverbs ‘a relaxed attitude lengthens a man’s life,’ ‘Death and life are in the power of the tongue.’ Proverbs 18.21 You can’t get closer to health or unhealthy than that!

We all know people whose words make themselves feel ill. They are so aggressive and bitter they give themselves ulcers and arthritis. If you desire life and love many days, says David, keep your tongue from evil. Ecclesiastes 5.6 explains that our mouth causes our flesh to sin and on the contrary, Proverbs 16.24 says, pleasant words are not only sweet to the soul but health to the bones. So whether we accept the responsibility of what we say or not, we shall certainly have to live with the consequences.

Unwise words bring their own backlash, e.g. ‘Some people like to make cutting remarks, but the words of the wise, soothe and heal.’ We have to assume that the person speaking hears his own words. ‘A wholesome tongue is a tree of life.’ That’s Proverbs again in chapter 15.4

And there is almost a command in Isaiah which says, ‘they shall not say they are sick.’ That will stop you hearing about it !

Troubled Emotions

Many well-informed and professional people have written much on this subject and how the emotional life can affect the body.

But just to remind ourselves of one or two basics, problems of the body can have their origin for instance in childhood where the emotional habits are formed and where the traumas of life are not easily dealt with and counteracted. Wrong patterns and wrong relationships and hurts can be forgotten and buried in a subconscious part of the mind so the sick one may not know the real cause.

One of the commonest is a feeling of rejection and being unloved and unwanted leading to a sense of inadequacy and insecurity and incidentally bringing with it the rebellion that is a fight for love.

There is a need for someone to come alongside as it were and deal with a healing of the memories and this can sometimes be a lengthy matter.

Overeating

In the modern enlightened age in which we live we will now all be fully educated about our diets. The media, newspapers, magazines and advertising will ensure it if not. But discipline in our eating habits will always be a must for those who want to be aglow with vital health. Too much food or the wrong kind causes a host of well-known diseases classified by the medical profession; heart trouble, arthritis, diabetes and many more. Gluttony anyway is a sin and can be aligned with greed, covetousness and idolatry.

There was a man in David's day who was so ill he was left to die. He was without food and water for three days, found by David's men, recovered and was able to give them valuable help. It was forced fasting but it worked. 1 Samuel 30:11 and 12 'And they found an Egyptian...and gave him bread...a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins...and when he had eaten his spirit came again to him for he had eaten no bread nor drunk any water for three days and three nights.'

'They buried the people that lusted' (for the meat) Numbers 11.34 It has a nasty ring about it. 'Their future is eternal loss,' Paul says in Philippians 3.19 'for their God is their appetite.' Oh dear!

Hosea warns about the dangers of alcohol, 'the princes made him sick with bottles of wine.' We know that is possible.

Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, let us do it to the glory of God.

If we fast regularly or even occasionally but in the correct way that Isaiah describes in chapter 58, 'as unto the Lord' then we can expect that our health as it tells us will spring forth speedily. (58.8)

Failure to honour Parents

Another thing that concerns our heavenly Father is the commandment to honour our parents; so much so that the Bible follows this one by saying that if we do we can expect to have a long and good life. It is an honour just to be wrinkled and white-haired in some countries. In general, in the west we do not tend to provide a carefree old age without worrying financial anxieties and the dreadful malady of loneliness.

Can we be sure that our own elderly relatives enjoy a high and honoured status with as much love and care, as well as practical help, we can give them? Few elderly people find it easy to wash their own feet. Recently a man of over eighty married a very young woman who was his chiropodist. His children complained about their inheritance disappearing but had never looked after his feet. There is another ministry if anyone needs one.

We won't like this seventh stage of man ourselves - 'sans eyes, sans ears, sans everything' as Shakespeare writes. By caring for our older citizens we teach our children how to care for us.

High status in the community is a necessity for our seniors if they are to go on to fully discharge all the divine plan for their lives, to be like Caleb, God-fearing and eighty when he took a mountain in battle, full of strength to show the next generation what God could do for him and for them Joshua 14.6ff .

Acting Presumptuously

Once upon a time others were being healed but I was not impressed. It was not charismatic enough for me. There was not enough worship and it was not the right time. There was too much talk and so on. God had to show me my mistaken pride. It was a direct insult to Him. My excuses and self-justification did not hinder Him healing many others but I went on being sick. And why ask God for healing if, when He provides the choice of servant we want someone else. It is immaturity if we can only go to one source for our help and according to Deuteronomy 17.12 we act presumptuously if we 'will not hearken' to the one He has set apart to minister.

It is sad that King Saul, the first king of Israel, who began his calling with great courage and humility, just couldn't wait. His presumption cost him dearly. The command was to wait for Samuel to perform the sacrifice but Saul took it on himself to do so. At some point it is clear that he had a mighty empowering of the Spirit but now, says Samuel, 'the kingdom shall be taken from you'.

Lying Down Inside

There is no doubt that some are sick because they don't want to get well. When Jesus saw the sick man who had been waiting for thirty-eight years, he said 'Do you want to be made whole?' John 5.6 Not just relief from symptoms you notice, but perfectly whole. He might have been very settled and comfortable with his companions in trouble and his own particular spot. He had to be sure and to make the man himself sure about what he wanted. Excessive grief can cause this kind of trouble.

Illness can be due to personal attitudes of fear or frustration and all forms of tension and self-pity and the stress of it all makes us eventually want to give up. Do we really want to be made whole. Proverbs 18.14 puts it rightly, 'the spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit, who can bear?'

Do you really want to give up your disability allowance from the NHS?
Sometimes too, our sympathies should be directed towards those who push the wheelchairs for years and years without relief. Time without a visible end lays a very heavy burden on long term carers.

Depression

The thick darkness which could be felt was one of the plagues of Egypt. For three whole days it was such that no-one moved. It was a thick darkness, a darkness that could be felt. 'A thick darkness in all the land of Egypt which could be felt.' Exodus 10:22 The darkness of depression is very similar. All activity ceases when the mind is so clouded. God has, however, already separated the light from the dark and He did it when He created the world. In Psalm 139 David declares that although he might be smothered in darkness or even if he himself made his own bed in hell, the darkness and the light were both alike to God. We know, too, that according to Paul 'nothing can separate us, nothing at all, from the love of God.'

It is not an easy matter, however, to reverse the trend which pulls downwards into heaviness when ill. It takes a great effort of will to disregard the way we feel and deliberately resort to praise and prayer. Even a chemical-reaction depression, a physical malady, can have its antithesis in praise, actually in the face of illness, loneliness and pain.

Disobedience

It is a mistake to enter into a contract of marriage with a partner who does not belong to the Lord and has no interest in spiritual matters. God does restore the years that the locust has eaten, (Joel 2.25) but it is often after much heartache and pain that He does it. Deliberate disobedience to the known will of God as expressed in the Scriptures will always bring trouble sooner or later. There are plenty of ways to be disobedient but this is a major fault.

'Be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.' 2 Corinthians 6.14

The suggestion of being yoked together like oxen means that where one goes the other must go; when one stops the other stops; wonderful to be like that with Christ and an equally lovely picture of life with a Christian partner, but just an impossibility with one who is not. It brings an over-stretching, tearing, searing quality to all actions and decisions. The pressure can be impossible for the human frame to bear. We can accustom ourselves fairly well to manage the stresses and shocks of normal daily living but this kind of divided life will overwhelm an otherwise healthy body and this is just one example of disobedience.

Fornication

The sin of fornication or sexual intercourse outside marriage seems to rate special mention in the Bible. It certainly gets a lot of attention and bears particular weight in God's sight. Here we sin against our own bodies. Every other sin is outside our body but this touches the temple of the Holy Spirit.

It has never been exclusive to one generation, one country or one age. I hesitate to contemplate whether it is worse now than when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt or thousands of years later in Paul's day but we find him speaking in

1 Corinthians chapter 5 in association with the complete destruction of the flesh so that the body may be saved. (verse 5) He says that it is not possible or right that we should separate ourselves from those who are outside Christ while we are here on earth, but that we should not even eat with those who call themselves part of the body of Christ and who are still involved in sexual sin. He states clearly we cannot even talk of purity if one among us is allowed to continue in this way. Soon, he warns, all will be affected. It is like yeast in a loaf of bread.

Spiritual adultery

The evil of fornication is seen when God likens it to spiritual adultery. Through Ezekiel in chapter sixteen He speaks to Jerusalem in a parable.

A lovely wife, crowned and bejewelled by her husband, with great renown among the heathen nations for her comeliness, is like His people. But she is given over to fornication with idolaters. Although He spells it out for them, clearly showing them that it is He, their Lord God who has put the perfection of beauty upon her, loved her and made her His bride, she has chosen to play the harlot.

'For her house inclines unto death,' says Proverbs 2.18. No amount of healing is possible.

They had chosen to disregard the covenant made with their beloved.

To abstain from fornication, says Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4.3 is an absolute must in the life of holiness.

Fortunately we don't have to deal with this danger in other people's lives - the Lord is the avenger of all such' says Paul.

J.Allen Peterson writes, 'What was once labelled infidelity and carried a stigma, is now an affair which is a nice sounding, almost inviting word wrapped in mystery and excitement. It has become a relationship not a sin. What was once a secret, closely guarded, is now headlines, a TV theme, a best seller and as common as the cold.' The Bible says, 'Respect marriage, be faithful to your partner'. Hebrews 13:4 Marriage is honourable and the bed undefiled...but God will judge.' Contrary to popular thinking an affair will not simplify life but bring unimaginable complications.

Homosexuality

The modern conscience has been twisted and distorted so badly that it is difficult to tell what is genuine and what is false. Sometimes the question is only 'What is in it for me?' Self-centredness is an evil of our age. When it brings profit or pleasure to us we are inclined to call evil, good even when we know it is wrong.

Thomas a Kempis in his 'Imitation of Christ' said, 'If thou goest here and there seeking thine own will, thou shalt never be happy or free from care.'

It is not easy to see how else to explain this danger to the human body than by the following passage in Roman 1.

Even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.'

God gave them up. Was there ever a more tragic statement?

They were guilty of worshipping and serving the creature more than the Creator.

Immorality

Can a man hold fire against his chest and not be burned? Can he walk on hot coals and not blister his feet? These questions are asked in Proverbs in connection with adultery. The obvious answer is no. Was Solomon thinking of his father or himself or the general trends of the day?

David's little babe grew deathly sick and subsequently died. No amount of fasting and prayer could bring healing. This was the one born as a result of adultery with Bathsheba. David had all he needed. He was a very rich man, King of the land and with all power. If that had not been enough God would have given him whatever he desired. He also had concubines in abundance and other wives. Temptation is not sin if we are aware and awake to the dangers. In a sense, in the western world we have all we need, too, and yet we are not satisfied or content.

It ought not even to be named among us. Neither to watch it with our eyes nor harbour it in our hearts makes sense. Let us remember too that the visions of the mind and the thoughts that go with masturbation also mean adultery.

Hosea speaks of a God who viewed Israel as an adulterous wife and this was the cause of her loss of children, her inability to conceive and her miscarriages and stillbirths.

Seeking help from the Wrong Source.

'When they see how sick they are, Ephraim will turn to Assyria, to the great king there, but he can neither help nor cure. I will go and return to my place, till

they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face. In their affliction they will seek me early. Hosea 13.15

God admits to the great hope on His heart that in their affliction they will seek Him. So there is no haste on His part to heal or cure. He will wait to see if they do seek Him.

Outside Opinion

When proper sources of help and advice have finished with us and friends and relations are exhausted with our continued complaints, then sometimes we turn to other fountains of so-called wisdom and there are always plenty of them!

Some ideas are so conflicting, we are left floundering and helpless again. It is easy to be buffeted back and forth when ill, adding stress to an already troubled body and mind because we are taken up with methods and people rather than looking to the only true source of stability and real help, the Lord our God. In any case we will never make our lives work by formulas and aids. It is the whole person we are after not a crutch. Power is needed not false hopes.

False Doctrine

False teaching that preaches easy healing, for instance, Christian Science, so called, has in fact no need for healing as it presupposes that there is no such thing as sin and sickness. Such ideas of men can be traced back to Satan who seeks to undermine the work of Christ. Sin, along with sickness and death are not just illusions. Such beliefs can cause confusion and fear in themselves, and worse, can eliminate the need and desire for Bible reading and earnest prayer and seeking after God.

Worldly-wise Opinion

Unfortunately as a nation and in the West particularly, we are obsessed by beauty and fashion and all outward signs of prosperity as equalling health. Physical fitness may be our one aim and if we can no longer jog, walk, swim, be slim, stay sun tanned, play badminton and squash, etcetera, etcetera, we become unbalanced.

A Christian friend of mine has a picture on her refrigerator door of a well-known actress. Lovely as the actress is, my friend's objective is to be like her but it is not God's idea. He doesn't want us impersonating anyone, however beautiful. To be

somebody we are not, doesn't figure in God's plan for us, so it is a non-option. We are not clones. We are not products of advertising and we don't worship bodily perfection or we ought not to. This may be why we fear to be old. 'Old' does not seem to be desirable as the sellers of cosmetics and all else manufactured, would have us think.

Wholeness is different from external perfection and has its root word with holiness.

No Faith

This must be included here as God's word states;

'Whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.' Romans 14.23

'Without faith it is impossible to please God.' Hebrews 11.6

Is lack of faith an obvious hindrance to healing?

The faith that counts on emotions and feelings will be. but faith that is an attitude of will that says, in effect, whether I feel God is there or not, whether I feel He will heal me or not, His word tells me He hears and answers prayer and I count on that.

John 5.14 says, 'If we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.'

'Faith is the substance' was Rees Howell's motto when he moved God for thousands of souls to be saved and millions of pounds to build a Bible School in Swansea. (Rees Howells, Intercessor by Norman Grubb. Lutterworth Press.)

'Your Father knows the things you need, before you ask Him,' we are told by Jesus (Matt. 6.8) If we need more faith we can certainly ask and receive it.

'Why are you so fearful,' (Mark 4.40) 'how is it that you have no faith?'

The Christian life is not walked by sight and much of the conflict within us is caused by the desire to see a visible reality of what we ask for.

There is a choice all along the way. Which principle will we live by - faith or sight? Our testing circumstances, especially severe illness, give us the opportunity of adopting one principle or the other.

We may have been calculating all along without Him but we can still begin again with a complete surrender and wholehearted trust.

Paul spoke to the man from Lystra who had never walked and saw that he had faith to be healed and he was healed. (Acts 14.8)

What about the following - 'Thy daughter is dead!!' When Jesus heard it He answered, 'Fear not, believe only and she shall be made whole.' Luke 8.

She herself could not exercise any faith at all. She was dead!

To be fearful and unbelieving is associated in the book of Revelation with the second death.

It tells us in Romans that God has given to every man a measure of faith (12.3).

Perhaps our measure has never been tested or exercised. Let's think soberly and not

be irrational and nervous in the face of some seeming tragedy but recognise faith as a gift of God to us personally and receive it and may be reverse the situation.

Rebellion

Rebellion is aligned with the sin of witchcraft and is punishable by death. See Samuel 15.23.

It is also associated with the loss of children. 'These two things shall come to you . The loss of children and widowhood.' 'They shall come upon you for the multitude of sorceries and abundance of enchantments.' Isaiah 47.9

In this instance the sin was spiritism and looking to astrologers, sorcery and witchcraft. It is all strictly forbidden and we play with these things to our peril.

In Isaiah 1.5 it says that the whole head is sick and the whole heart faint because of the sin of rebellion. Satan has a way of interfering with a personality as well as the person.

Murmuring and Complaining

This brought sad results to Israel, especially to Miriam when she contracted leprosy because of it. Although Moses graciously prayed for her when she spoke against him, Miriam still had to bare the consequences before healing took place. Grumbling is an easy habit to acquire. We ought never to let it take hold and especially complaining about acknowledged spiritual leaders.

Nepotism

It seems reasonable that we worship the Creator of our children rather than the children themselves as we are so prone to do. Undue favouritism like David's with his son Absalom, whom he refused to correct, brought nothing but trouble for himself and his peers.. In the end there was an untimely death for the beloved son he adored. 2 Samuel 14 to 15 verse 6. The king knew of the serious fault in his son's character but refused to correct him.

It may be that if we intercede for our nation and our own generation God will bring salvation and healing for us and our children.

Unforgiveness

The word forgiveness is used about ninety times in the Bible and has over ten different meanings when translated from the Hebrew and the Greek , recover; put away forever; lift up; pardon, excuse, absolve or quit and so on..

An article in the national press once recorded that a Harley Street psychiatric specialist stated he could send home half his patients if only they could themselves be assured of forgiveness and could forgive others.

We need contact with God so it is a blessed relief to know as David says in Psalm 130 'if God should mark iniquities, who then should stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee.'

But of necessity it must be included also that Matthew tells us in chapter 18 about the parable Jesus spoke of when he described the fate of the unforgiving servant. He had all his debts wiped out but had no compassion on those who owed him. He was therefore delivered to the tormentors. So let's forgive from the heart, as He suggests because tormentors can be very tormenting!

Chapter Four A Fate Worse than Ignorance

'Hear, all people; hearken o earth and
All that is therein.'

Micah is speaking to the whole world. If we relate to rebellion and deliberately ignoring instructions, it seems we are not alone. The rest of our human race is capable of the same.

But, unhappily, God says, in the same message,
'Therefore also will I make you sick in smiting you, desolate because of your sins.' 6:13

We may not like it and we may not want to talk about sin but we have to face it so we might as well do it head on and get it over. These that Micah spoke to were false prophets divining for money; threatening those who didn't pay up; part or full-dabbling in the occult; idolatry and fraud and stealing, using lies and deceit. We have to recognise that sometimes our illnesses originate in sin and some of it very much like these.

'There is no soundness in my flesh,' says David, 'because of your anger, neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin.' Psalm 38:5&3

In becoming guilt ridden and distressed with his own failings he had produced physical reactions in his body. His wounds stank because of his own foolishness. Some of this chapter must necessarily be concerned with satanic interference.

First, let it be said that the enemy of our souls is not usually able to trouble us without being given some foothold. Before the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, there was no sickness. Everything that God had made was very good. It was the consequence of Adam's sin that brought disease and death into his and our world. So it may rightly be said that it is possible that the cause of our affliction is due to some work of Satan.

An instance is given in the New Testament when Jesus had compassion on the woman who was bound for eighteen years. She had spent that time with a spirit of infirmity, so bent that she saw only herself! What a life! Jesus explains in Matthew's gospel chapter 12 that he is able to control demon spirits like this and make them obey him because he had already bound the strong man, Satan. What was already bound in heaven could be bound on earth. There are many such demonic or evil spirits under Satan's jurisdiction that are active but the power of the devil has been broken so that we now have no need to fear his army or to put up with its work.

The church has been given complete authority over hell and all its activity although we cannot take this authority and use it lightly. We are not snipers but soldiers under orders, disciplined to obey Christ in any given situation.

It would be unwise to be dogmatic in all things demonic and subjects relating to deliverance for the Christian and there are many books written about it from every angle but if we seem to be making little progress when we need healing or when trying to help others, it will not be possible to ignore this issue.

We are requested to 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.' Phil.2.12b God is also working in us so although our salvation is complete, it also needs to be worked out with our willing co-operation. We are being saved all day long as well as having been saved at the time of our new birth. We were once dead in trespasses and sins, dead spiritually, with no communication with God. Now, since His Spirit is within us we are made alive and quickened. Demons, however, can still afflict the emotions, the body and will. The aim is to remove the demon who is trespassing or oppressing so that the Lord Jesus Christ can rule over all the areas of our mortal bodies, spiritual and physical.

'If you keep on sinning, it shows that you belong to Satan, who, since he first began to sin has kept steadily at it' These are not my words, but a paraphrase of 1 John 3.8. It means our own responsibility cannot be lightly glossed over with the hope that once dealt with the demon will be cast out, we will be healed and can go merrily on our way or, in other words, back to the old life habits.

On the contrary we want everything to do with the old life behind us and nailed to the cross of Christ with a deliberate turning away from the cause of the problem.

The gift of discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 4 and 10) will be needed in the church so that the presence of demonic activity is detected by the spiritually sensitive ministering pastor or Christian. And also that we don't get confused into thinking everything must necessarily be satanic in its cause.

Jesus came to set men and women free and Christ gave this authority to his disciples.

'They brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick.' Matt.8:16

'And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.' Mark 6:13

'Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils and to cure diseases.' Luke 9:1

In an endeavour to stick as close to scriptural examples as possible, demonic activity can cause or aggravate the following sicknesses;

Dumbness 'They brought to him a dumb man possessed with a devil.'

Matt.9:32

Blindness and Dumbness 'Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind and dumb.' Matt.12:22

Epilepsy 'The spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming.' Mark 9:20

Deafness and Dumbness 'He rebuked the foul spirit.'

Fever 'He rebuked the fever.' Luke 4:39

Back Trouble 'She was made straight whom Satan had bound.' Luke 13:13

When the fear of God fell upon the Jews and Greeks at Ephesus after Paul's preaching, the first thing they knew they must do was to burn all the books on curious arts. Books and incantations, their charms with them, were brought along to a public bonfire, such was the moving of the Holy Spirit among them. Because of this open display of relinquishing the works of the devil, the Name of the Lord was greatly honoured in an area where there had been black magic and occult involvement. 'A solemn fear stirred them,' says The Living Bible in Acts 19:17. So much so that they wanted to be *seen* to be cleansed and repentant.

A word must be said about the work of Satan in a non-Christian or an unbeliever's life. A non-believer can, of course, be delivered from demonic spirits and made whole and be healed. But the word of God seems to make it clear that it would be highly undesirable to deliver such a one and leave them without the work of salvation completed. Demons must respond to the one who exercises the authority of the Name of Jesus but when the unclean spirit is cast out he will seek to return.

Jesus' words recorded in Luke 11 are very clear and challenging.

'When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walks through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, I will return to my house whence I came out.'

Finding the place swept and decorated, 'he goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter in, and dwell there. The last state of that man is worse than the first.' Verses 24-26

Unless Christ is established within, therefore, there will be a void and the unbeliever will have no grounds for resisting, personally, the enemy of his soul.

Sin opens the door for the entrance of demons in the first place and unless the sin is repented of and forsaken, and the life submitted to God, the way is wide open for further demonic activity. It would seem therefore, to be the normal way of serious behaviour, that is to submit to the Lord first and receive the new birth and experience repentance and after that to receive deliverance from the afflictions. Thereafter can the Holy Spirit fill every empty part. Deliverance is not a cure-all. Nevertheless it is a very necessary part of the whole healing program. The Bride of Christ will want to rid herself of all spots and blemishes.

Chapter Five When Heaven is Silent

Chapter three in Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for healing. It is markedly increased in emphasis in our day so it seems that now is the time. There is a development of Christian healing centres and also the ministry of healing within the church is increasing. The need for it seems to be increasing with the development! There is always an overwhelming response to any meeting or group or persons that operate any kind of healing ministry.

Well, 'gifts of healing' is one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit given to the church so that everyone may profit (1 Corinthians 12:9.)

So let's start by creating an expectancy and a hopefulness about it because some may just be asking - 'Why, Lord, when you seemed to say you would heal me and gave me that special word just for me, two weeks ago, three months ago, why am I still in exactly the same state, if not worse, today?'

Why indeed, and sometimes our whole relation to God hangs on the answer.

Apparently we thought we knew his will and heard him speak. We know, without doubt, he wants to make people whole. There may even have been a word of prophecy pointedly directed at our own need. It was confirmed by others and tested by the scriptures and yet we are still in the same state. God seems miles away. Sometimes, even, can you believe it, actually healing others.

Well, it is never wrong to ask God why. This is not one particular question he shuts his ears against and he does take notice of searching minds, even when circumstances are a complete enigma. Perhaps especially then.

But he may be silent because he has already spoken. So we can take simple steps to find the answer to our own question.

1. First of all change the negative to a positive. Don't feel in the least bit condemned. He did say it and he did mean it. Grasp hold of what God said to you again. If necessary say it out loud. This is your word and it is also His word. He is faithful. 'He is watching over his word to perform it. 'His word will never return to him void.' Isaiah 55.11. He will accomplish the thing for which he sent it.

2. We can reaffirm that we are earnestly set on allowing him to have his own way. We know that we have sought him for himself and now we want, much more intensely, to know his will. This sickness is a nasty interference with our plans of course, but even so, we do want his will. But it may just be possible that we are thinking our own thoughts about it. We think we know, for instance where, when and how it is all to be accomplished. A look at past experience and then at other people's dealings with God allows a horizontal type of reliance on the understanding of the one who is ministering to our need.

It may be almost unconsciously that we are leaning towards a feeling that we know the steps we ought to be taking to actually get the job done. And worse, as he has spoken it, it ought to be done *now*.

Actually this is a unique position which may not come our way again to learn more about God Himself and His ways. While we are concerned with his promises, He may be concerned with us. The bible clearly states that his thoughts are not ours. We better believe that. (Isa.55.8)

His ways and his thoughts are higher than ours. It doesn't say we can't try to reach up and stretch ourselves to find them. Even if too sick to care, God can get us searching after his way to know more personally some of his loving thoughts.

3. The psalms of David are so relevant when we suffer. David said, 'he waited patiently for the Lord.' 40.1 The word 'patience' is taken from the Latin for suffering. Fancy that. It suggests that we have to struggle with something extra on top of the miserable sickness. Patience. We don't really want to have anything to do with it. David waited patiently but the word also incorporates the sense of waiting expectantly. Personally, I have no patience at all. In all my nursing training everything had to be done now and at top speed without actually running.

It wasn't until I went through a possible break-up of a marriage and when they call it that, that is exactly what it is, breaking and destroying like an earthquake, that God

taught me there was a possibility too of learning patience by actually enduring the waiting while he did the healing he had promised.

4. Are we willing to leave it *all* in his hands? And for as long as necessary? Although he seems silent, God has now begun to answer our questions with questions of his own. The very patience he shows us we need is a measure of the undivided attention he is giving us. He wants to show us more of himself and at last he has our ear, .maybe, could it be for the first time? We are actually listening. We are waiting on him and what is more, for him. This great grace of waiting on God for the good thing we desire from him is his topmost desire for us. It is absolutely crucial for a deeper walk with Him. Although we see and hear nothing at all from heaven our wait must be cultivated. As we wait our confidence in him increases. The benefits of a much closer walk will soon become apparent.

5. Quiet! No more questions!! Step by step, because of our suffering, or in spite of it, we will come to know God better. We also know by the Holy Spirit, that he is at work. There is a need to come to this quiet place where we are at last silent and still. No more testing God. No more trying to see if we can work it all out. This will become a trysting place just God and me. He speaks and I listen and I speak and He listens. It is now as though he is looking down and I am looking up and we meet there in sweet and precious communion. Deep calls to deep and like the still waters he is leading us by we are at last in the place He planned. We have become like children, gazing at Him while he is working, completing the thing that we have asked. He has given us words that will become life and health (or medicine) to all our flesh and they must be worked into the heart. Forget about your faith being too feeble; forget for the moment about the enemy at the gate; forget about all causes of fear and doubt and let your heart take courage and wait. Nothing need keep us from the assurance that the time spent is not in vain. This is the rest of faith that is epitomised by the life of Isaac.

The book of Proverbs is often very difficult to grasp without the help of a good paraphrased version. It seems to deliberately obscure it's own meaning! But the verse in chapter four, 'the life and health to all their flesh' is quite clear. It states that out of the heart are the issues of this life.

It is with the heart that we learn to live and also with the heart that we wait on God. We tend to want to cultivate the mind so much and that is all very good but it is the heart that needs the courage to go ahead. 'Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding.' Prov. 3:5

We do have both these powers from God and it is the heart where the inner spiritual life is to be nourished. The word of God is taken in with the mind but we have to confess that our thoughts are not going to make much difference to our sick bodies, or, for that matter, to our spiritual lives, until the heart can believe in silence. This will be an added extra to our healing, that we have had this sweet and deeply satisfying fellowship with him. And to be honest, he desires that far more than we do. His delight is in the sons of men the Bible tells us. Proverbs 8

There are not many that can help with this. Friends can and probably will, give you your medicine three times a day, just as the doctor ordered and also hopefully three times a day, some word from scripture as well. You will have the sense to swallow it for yourself but beyond that not many well-meaning friends and relatives can go. They seem especially unable to be of real help with your deeper pains and suffering. The most loving and dearest of them can, sometimes, like Job's three friends, only complete the seven days silently; even fasting with you as they did with Job and just being as near to you as they can be. This is all a great comfort and means a lot. You can't do without friends, none of us can, even when we are strong and healthy. Neither can we do without the church in their direct ministry of healing. But it is only with the heart in direct communication with God that the life of the inner spirit works the power that will bring these wonderful, unexpected and sometimes impossible things to pass. It is very possible that we may be hindering God working by our questions and our constant need for explanations.

You will remember Joshua and his mighty victory over Jericho. Joshua 6. The dear man then went rushing on to a victory over Ai. chapter 7. But it didn't work. The army was overcome and many men of great courage died. It was because Joshua did not wait for God's counsel. There was victory in the end, God gave them a second chance and told them what to do, step by step, after they had received his rebuke.

Joshua had many other big moments in the history of Israel and it was only three times he failed but each time for the same reason, he couldn't wait. Let this be your opportunity to cultivate this habit of waiting. At this moment in your history it may be more important than the healing.

It will put a kind of adorning on your life like fresh dew that others will recognise. Like a quiet assurance of the sense of his presence and it will make them long for more of God for themselves. That is practically guaranteed.

God will not keep you waiting one moment longer than necessary. There is great wisdom in the following. Mediate on it as often as possible

'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.' Isaiah 40.31

Prayer, 'Let me, O God, be so in tune with thee, and so close to thee, that my spirit will prosper as my body prospers and my body as my spirit.' Anon

There was once a lady I know quite well or rather I think I do. I must tell the truth, she lives with me, er, actually in my skin! Well, one day she was sick in body and had to be admitted for some time into the local hospital. Of course, her poor mind was affected but she was advised to acquiesce. What a way to learn. Sometimes there is no other way. God knows how difficult this lady is and let's face it, stubborn. He wanted to teach her more about resting.

It took a fortnight; two whole weeks to realise that he wanted complete rest of soul and mind and spirit as well as body. No more questions, no expressed desires; all self-confidence given up and no more imaginary hope. It had to be like flowers that look up at the sun and grass that grows without constant reassurance. 'Come apart into a desert place and rest awhile.' Mark 6.38

'Come, my people, enter into your chambers, and shut the doors about you: hide . . . until the indignation is past.' (hide until the Lord's wrath against your enemies has passed) Isaiah 26:20 He has already spoken so he can afford to be silent.

God rested on the seventh day and it is in association with this non-activity that the writer to the Hebrews tells us to rest also. (4.10.) It should be continual and it is not associated with idleness. Divine faculties need to rest as well as the physical ones. God made provision for the Israelites in sending the ark, symbolic of his presence, before them to seek out a place of rest for them.

Life was not to be all work. There were commandments given in connection with their resting periods. 'Six days shall you labour and do all your work' Ex. 20.9 Not five days as we like to do, not four or three as the management would like. Some like it if the law is changed to be seven days work and no rest.

It is really no wonder that the days of our lives are sometimes shortened. We are to remember the seventh day of the week and do as God did and keep it holy. It is a shame to say that even ministers of religion are forced to take what is called a sabbatical year off simply because they have worked themselves to a standstill. Even on their days off the telephone is ringing and visiting those in need has to be fitted in somehow. There are Christian people who will ring their doctor on his day off to be sure of speaking in private to him about their problems. It's hard to believe isn't it?

'If you will not hearken unto Me, and will not do all these commandments and despise My statutes, I will even appoint over you tuberculosis and burning fevers . . . Leviticus 26

This indicates the strength of His desire that we have regular and sometimes prolonged periods of rest. The time in early Israelite days was always with a plus. It was put together with rejoicing and play, festivities and banquets. When did you last have a feasting day just for the enjoyment?

This nation God was training in his ways, it was given clearly to understand that regular stops to their daily activities was his particular wish for them. They were to reverence his day once a week for a start but also to enjoy it!

Leviticus 25 makes it clear, too, that God expected the land to have rest. For six years they could plough, prune and harvest but in the seventh year the land was to rest. God would make the sixth year so plentiful they would have adequate to live on. There was one whole year to live with His provision.

It was probably a more exciting year than all the rest put together.

Then there was something more. Every seven times seven years brought them to the fiftieth year when it seemed that God wanted them to go as far as they could in joy and relaxation. *The Jubilee Year!*

All public and private debts to be paid up and all family estates returned to the original owner. What a good idea! It would keep you on your toes about the management of the land and the people working it. Seven is a number portraying, among other things, God's judgement, so that He could say quite legitimately and with loving mercy and justice, that He would repay seven times more severely if His laws were not kept. To abhor His statutes would bring terrible diseases. It was just not worth it.

As well as plagues, destructions and hungers, the land itself would not yield its normal increase; the trees would not bear their normal fruit load. It aligned the disobedience with breaking the covenant. God takes the trouble to explain the results carefully. The following are only the ones associated with physical and mental health and there were others to do with the land.

- Sudden terrors and panic (depression?)
- Tuberculosis or consumption and burning fever
- The eyes consumed
- Life ebbing away
- Running when no-one is chasing (unexplained fears)
- Strength spent in vain
- Children dying
- Wars
- Plagues
- Destruction of food supply
- Dead bodies rotting in the streets
- Perishing and pining away

It is understandable that there has been such heated argument about Sunday trading. Those who do not agree with it care deeply about God's laws and also about the people of their generation. He has given us a responsibility about these things. Even if we have nothing apparently wrong physically, if we have become so accustomed to being tired and weary that we no longer recognise it as abnormal, then we automatically eliminate the one thing that may inhibit our bodies fighting infections and diseases. The body has to be able to recuperate and restore itself. Our souls as well need refreshment and God cannot always work this over night in our normal sleeping hours. They are often just about as short as we can make them anyway.

We need to give a few minutes to consider the gift of sleep here and why the lack of it is such a stressful condition. There *are* reasons.

- 1) The gift may not have been received. 'He gives his beloved sleep'. Ps.127
And 'He gives us richly all things to enjoy'. 1Timothy 6.17
- 2) God Himself may have a reason 'The king could not sleep'. Esther 6.1
So he got up, read the chronicles, saved Mordecai from hanging and gave orders to others for the preparation necessary to save the whole Jewish race.
'The Lord called Samuel'. 1 Samuel 3.4 Three times God woke the embryo prophet, spoke to him in the night and changed the course of the nation's history.
'Joseph, being raised from sleep was warned of God in a dream'. Matthew 1.24
Four times this man was alerted to wake up, four times he was instantly obedient to the angel's direction and all before the end of the second chapter of Matthew.
Are we so desperate for sleep when it may be the only time God can get us alone.
Nevertheless, insomnia certainly borders on incomplete health.
3. Fear is another reason for sleeplessness, and worse, sudden fear.
'When you lie down, you shall not be afraid; you shall lie down and your sleep shall be sweet.....be not afraid of sudden fear'. Proverbs 3.24,25
4. Unsolved financial responsibilities. 'Rich investments turn sour.....the rich must worry and suffer insomnia...keep your riches to your own hurt' Eccl.5.13
And conversely 'If you love sleep you will end in poverty.' Proverbs 20.13
5. Too little to do. 'Consider the ways of the ant. She works hard providing all she needs.' Proverbs 6.6
Do you feel you have worked hard enough to justify a celebratory night's sleep?
It is all significant, because next to food, fresh air and exercise, sleep is essential to a healthy life. And if you do suffer from insomnia, you will have time to check all this out.

The only way for a shepherd in the east in times past, in caring for a wayward sheep was to, literally, break one of it's legs. It could then no longer roam into pastures that had not been considered fit by the shepherd. Neither could it be lost by wandering into dangerous places and coming face to face with catastrophic situations too big to handle alone.

Then, when the leg is broken and healing, there is opportunity at last for the shepherd to lift the wayward sheep to hold it close to his breast. There it can listen to the things on the shepherd's heart and learn not to stray.

Our Chief Shepherd will do the same with us if necessary.

It's no good saying 'Help, Lord, the bottom has fallen out' if you are like Grabwell Grommet.

'On his 42nd birthday Grabwell Grommet read in fiery letters across the sky, 'someone's trying to kill you.' Over breakfast as he lit his first cigarette, salted his fried eggs and bacon and stirred cream and sugar into his coffee, he told his wife about it. 'But who would want to kill you?' she asked, 'I've no idea,' he replied.

Driving to work Grabwell made time by beating the lights and continually switching lanes. Once behind his desk he became preoccupied with ringing phones, urgent memos, pressing problems and decisions. At lunch, after his third martini, he could barely finish his steak and fries. Then he worked until 7.00 pm, sped home, drank two more cocktails, worked till midnight, downed two sleeping pills and got five hours sleep, a routine he maintained for about ten more years.

But then, just when he thought he had cheated death, it claimed him. When his grief stricken widow demanded an autopsy it revealed only emphysema, arteriosclerosis, ulcers, cirrhosis, pulmonary oedema, obesity, circulatory insufficiency, and a touch of lung cancer. Smiling through her tears his wife said, 'Grabwell would have been delighted to know he died of natural causes.' (Taken from United Christian Broadcasters, Word For Today)

Chapter Six When Heaven Speaks

Elisha 'fell sick of a sickness whereof he died!' 2.Kings 13.14 This must have been a great shock to his tried and tested young school-prophet-goers. It just could not have seemed right in their eyes. Elijah had gone to heaven by a whirlwind, carried majestically in a chariot of fire and surrounded by horses of fire. And Elisha was also a great man of God. One of the greatest. A prophetic giant. Why did he have to die of some awful, nameless disease and apparently, too, all alone. He was the anointed one, he was a true prophet, there was no doubt of his succession to the master before him, and he had received a double portion of the spirit of Elijah into the bargain.

We can only assume that there was no-one in among the school of prophets he was teaching that could pray for him. Not one it seems or perhaps none of the same calibre.

This may not be why he died but where were they when he needed them. It is priority number one to be able to reach God on behalf of men in the world of the prophet. That is what they are there for. Both these men had power, both worked miracles, had revelations and brought life into dead bodies. What is more they had the desire, the love, the recognised need in their hearts to speak with God on behalf of their world and their contemporaries. They were in touch with heaven and heaven was in touch with them.

Well, we can also go to the same kind of prophecy making school, go on to college and university and then take a research program but we can come out at the end just the same as we went in unless we do as they did and learn to pray. To spend time, and much time and then some more time on our knees. The prophet scholars were not just being taught verbally. It was a daily visual aid to watch the lives and actions of the men they followed. The basic characteristic of both of them, in fact the whole tenet of their lives was one of communication with God. They were *seen* to be men of prayer.

God's Pattern

Aaron is a picture in the Old Testament of an intercessor. In Exodus 28 he is a type of Christ as given to the people of Israel. Christ is our high Priest and he executes his priestly office after the pattern of Aaron. Aaron is to minister to God on behalf of the people, and dressed in a certain way which set him apart. The stones, for instance, on his shoulders were to be engraved with the names of all the tribes and this was a constant reminder to Jehovah of His people. The names of the tribes were also to be on the breastplate he wore and carried over his heart as he came in to the Lord.

There is more to this but it shows the grave privileges of the one who prays in the secret place before a holy God with the names of the needy on his lips and in his heart. 'No man takes this honour upon himself, but he that is called of God.' So also was Christ called of God, and 'offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears.' Hebrews 5: 4,7

We, too, can come, and boldly, to the throne of God for the needs of others. Some have a particular ministry for certain people and certain problems.

One woman I know has a prayerful concern toward children. She knows without doubt, if God lays them on her heart with compassion and they need healing, He will do it. She can also calm the parents and give assurance. She described in private one day how a neighbour called her into the bedroom of her little boy, aged three, to ask what she should do. His whole body was covered with large purulent and angry areas, converging on each other. She had seen and dealt with many sick children, medically, but had never encountered such a rash. His whole body was tingling with irritation and the poor little thing could not keep still. His temperature was high and he was very distressed. Something stilled my friend's heart and checked her from an emergency call to the doctor. Instead she laid both hands gently on the child's head and prayed silently for a few minutes. Immediately, she told me, she knew the little one would be completely healed and back to his normal energetic self . . . But! It would be in the morning.

The mother had to co-operate and leave her little one in the same troubled state over night. Her trust was just as great a part of the miracle. A happy mother and a completely cured child ran across the road soon after breakfast.

My friend had not been up all night in prayer, not on that occasion anyway. She explained that she felt her prayers and fasting were up-to-date.

It has been said that prayer is the most powerful form of human energy that there is. It affects every gland in the body of the person prayed for.

The following phrases can stimulate intercession. It is quite a good idea to collect some for yourself and keep them as quick references when needed. They show in miniature how much God cares about it.

‘I have surely seen the affliction of my people and have heard their cry . . . I know their sorrows.’ Exodus 3.7

‘Could you not watch with me one hour?’ Mark 14.37

‘The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.’ James 5.11

‘He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,.....to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.’ Isaiah

61

God wants to work in the lives of crushed and bruised people, through us.

In-depth Praying

The sick need to be prayed for, we know that. But where are those in our churches or outside, for that matter, who will take on themselves a greater burden of prayer? This can only be given by God, of course, and only if we are willing to receive it.

‘If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you.’ John 15.7

This is similar to John 14.13 'Whatever you ask in my Name that will I do.' And again in the following verse, 'If you ask anything in my Name, I will do it.'

These are strong words and they are not for children. The way of abiding brings about the promise, and the way of abiding in our Lord, says 1 John 1.6 is to walk as he walked. For instance, what would he do in the circumstances facing you, that you are praying about. This is a pattern of behaviour to be cultivated and used repeatedly. To be like him we wait in his presence until he reveals any standards we need to rise to; to adjust any way that we have gone that has been our own way; the Holy Spirit searches the life and throws light on motives or actions that need to be changed, cleansed or confessed, or all three. Let there be a radical inward reform of the old self-nature on any point that is revealed. We cannot abide in him in any other way and expect prayer to be automatically answered. While waiting and holding our burden or prayer request before him, he will give the assurance that we have received what we asked.

The promise is unlimited but the results depend on the abiding in His word. Then we can happily wait to see it in reality. This is the same procedure with individual requests or prayer for others or indeed, intercession for major and national search for answers.

So Let the Church Pray

'Is any sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church.' says James 5.14. This is not just a call for the vicar, welcome though he may be. It is a matter for two or three ministering people from the church, elders, in the plural. The Lord, says James, will do the raising up. It is often the case that the first move toward a sick person comes from the officiating officer. But that is not how the apostle describes the action. Let the sick one himself humble himself to do the calling and let more than one pray so that the church as a whole is represented and involved.

Anointing with oil is a lovely picture of the presence of the Holy Spirit that it is sometimes given prime place in the procedure but let them also pray over him. The prayer of faith, it says, will save the soul of the sick. All his sins forgiven at the same time. What an all-embracing and loving work God has given us.

A dear, middle-aged lady who had a crippling disease of the bones, had a lot of pain over a number of years and an operation that was also very painful but did not relieve anything at all. She called this kind of praying 'public sympathy' and felt it made a display of her sickness so she refused to call for anyone in her church to pray for her. Unhappily she continued in the same state. A loving, heavenly Father has no purpose to embarrass or mock us in public. He could easily heal in private and also

from a distance. He can do it by proxy or without anyone involved at all. But this is his way of communicating and ministering to one another within the church body. It brings glory to his Name rather than to the one who is sick or the one ministering.

And Let the People Pray

‘Pray one for another, that you may be healed.’ This is James again, in his very practical epistle. Jesus taught that we should love our neighbour as ourselves. It’s a command. It is said of Job that after he prayed for his friends, he was made whole, 6.1

Surely we cannot pray for others if we need healing ourselves. Well, it seems that God says, unless we can reach a place of wholehearted forgetfulness of our own needs and do pray for others, then our own healing may be in jeopardy. Self has no place, any more than self-pity has a place, in God’s healing program.

According to Job’s story, if we are really ill, then to pray for others is the quickest way to being made well.

Also the words of James suggest that our praying should be fervent. Fervent prayer brings with it the thought that we completely abandon our own desires and be wholly taken up with the needs of another. If at the time of our own sickness, we lose ourselves in our own needs, then we are missing a unique opportunity.

It may be that we don’t know anyone who is sick. In that case we can take up the cause of those who have no-one else to care for them.

What about the following:.

Children in your area awaiting transplants. There are only seconds sometimes between the life and death decisions the parents must make on behalf of those giving and those receiving.

You may like to actually start a community care program and home care nursing projects run privately for the elderly. Have you a local hospice for the terminally ill?. Pray one into being. You might need it one day.

There are relations struggling quite vainly for years with a schizophrenic person in the family. God has an answer to this dismaying and alarming condition and can show how to help in your prayers for both the disability and the carer.

Many illnesses these days are incomprehensible. The enemy seems to be regrouping forces and incurable attacks upon the human frame are called by names never previously heard. We have an allergy now that stops a person breathing air. It sounds as though it came straight up from the pit. The latest maiming disease, or

one of them, is one that affects the brain, you remain fairly normal but never want to go to work. That can't be from heaven or from earth.

What about other people's children? The little ones God had such compassion on when considering the fate of Nineveh with Jonah, were so young that they didn't know their right hand from their left. 'Shouldn't I spare Nineveh (one of the wickedest cities known at the time) wherein are more than six score thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand.' In that cry from God's heart He also mentions the cattle He wants spared.

Our nation's children are being swept away on a tide of immorality, violence and sickness. 25,000 a year for instance, are dying too early from accidents on the road.

Jeremiah's cry in his Lamentations is especially true for today's generation -

'Cry out in the night . . . pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. . . Lift up your hands toward him for the life of your young children. Why? because they faint for hunger in the top of every street.' 2.19

'My children are desolate', he says in chapter 1 verse 16 because the enemy prevails. Jeremiah is overcome with compassionate weeping. Our children, embroiled as they are in tragedy and calamity may have to carry a punishment greater than they can bear.

A town in the South West has recently reached a target of 1 million pounds toward the cost of building a hospice for the terminally ill. The vision was conceived by a local man who lost his wife with cancer. Instead of facing it as a complete tragedy and going under himself, he decided that this would be his goal. He would somehow find the money and motivate others to found this kind of building. Then the whole town became involved and wanted to join his efforts. The council became increasingly aware of the need and allowed a part of the town bordering the countryside to be set aside. The Hospice movement as a whole, say 'We can't cure them, but we can heal them.'

Now no-one in this fast growing industrial town need ever die alone or uncared for. We need to be able to say, you are utterly acceptable now, not when you look, feel, smell better, stop being sick, stop smoking, stop taking drugs, etc., etc.

Let it never be said of us that all our compassion was directed toward Afghanistan or Algeria but we are not sure of the names of our next door neighbour.

And let it never be said of us when we reach the gates of heaven that we wished with all our hearts that we had prayed more.

Chapter Seven. Heaven Too Soon

If you can manage to get face down on to the floor on a freshly hoovered carpet, (when you get that close the dust is still real) and just lie there, it is worth a try. You will be crying to God to do something and you are so desperate you must be as low before Him as possible. You will be worshipping and at the same time, crying to Him to remove the affliction or else make you whole, you can no longer take any more. You are no use to yourself or to anyone else. If He cannot see His way to heal you then could He please just take you home. You've simply had enough. There you are God, now I am underneath rock bottom and looking up. By the time you manage to get down there and have been for less than five minutes, He will have so refreshed you and drawn near, that hope will return enough to be able to see a tiny bit of what He *is* doing. It is certainly worth a try if you haven't actually been in that position, face down, before.

God is a God of an inexhaustible amount of hope and faith to give you. The Creator or your particular blood vessels, liver, kidneys and so on, never, ever grows weary or faint or faint-hearted. He is never tired of you or of your crying to Him and He is never at a loss or taken by surprise by your calamities and reactions to them. 'He has chastened me sore,' cried David in Psalm 118.18 'but He has not given me over to death.'

So, in our despair, what we don't want now is an untimely death, however much we may feel it is due or desirable.

There are reasons why death can come too soon and it is possible to precipitate a demise that is not ours at all but entirely God's responsibility.

1. Lack of Judging Ourselves. 'For this cause (i.e. taking communion without judging ourselves) for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.' Sleep, that is, as in death. 1 Cor. 11.30 The possibility of facing death because of an important omission in our teaching or understanding of certain scriptures, is real. It causes an end to life that need not occur.

The passage shows that we are trifling with the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to understand the meaning of it for ourselves and not generally. Taking the bread and the wine, quite simply, as it is offered to us during a church service, without a full realisation of all that God means by the act needs an adjustment.

It *is* a simple act. We take the bread remembering our Lord's death as a complete sacrifice for sin by dying on the cross, so bringing us back into fellowship with God. We also take the wine and drink it, knowing that it is symbolic of the new agreement between God and us that has been established by the shedding of Christ's blood. While we do this, or preferably before we do it, we must take the time and thought to judge ourselves and condemn that which is not good, pronouncing disapproval on the

habits and ways that we know are wrong. Then we can be sure that God will not be the one to censure us for them. He will never condemn us because we are told clearly in Romans 8.1 that 'there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.'

But if the self-judging is neglected, then we must of course be chastised. This is quite a different matter than being condemned.

2. Stubborn Disobedience. Sally, an attractive, Christian girl who grew into a gracious woman with a highly developed consciousness of other people's needs was an accomplished nurse. Her heart always went straight out to anyone in trouble and of course she had many friends. We always do have friends when we give ourselves and our gifts away. God is teaching hard things, however, and putting some steel into the jelly-like substance we call a spine.

One day Sally's world fell apart. Her only son was suddenly killed on a dangerous road while over taking another vehicle on his high-powered motorbike. And Sally helplessly watched it all happen. She had given her life to the Lord Jesus at a very early age and could still remember the excitement and thrill of that time. Nevertheless, her child had been born outside marriage and at the time of her son's death, she was contemplating a further association with a neighbour's husband.

Apart from flagrant opposition to God's laws, Sally had the spirit of the cuckoo, building in other people's nests.

We are all capable of disobedience; digging our heels in; self-centredness, self deceit and many other subtleties and ingenious reasoning to having our own way. If we do not think so, let us beware.

God must have respect from us for His laws. The first chapter of Isaiah talks of being 'sick, weak, faint, covered with bruises and welts and infected wounds.' What a picture of complete ill-health. And all because of rebellion.

Direct opposition to God brought a plague of boils it tells us in 1 Samuel 5.6 and in verse twelve it says that those who did not die were deathly ill.

The heart is certainly very deceitful and our actions are often for our own gain.

Even for Christians who are wholly committed, there is a constant battle to die daily to the desires of the natural person in us still vying for pre-eminence.

There is a kind of despair in extreme loneliness, so much so that we would do anything to stop it. But it is disaster to try to relieve it by breaking God's laws. We would be assisting the devil and his cohorts in their work of destruction.

An eminent speaker who had led many thousands to the Lord Jesus Christ in successful campaigns throughout the world, once described how he spent three days and three nights alone with the Lord in fasting and prayer. His purpose was for God

to reveal to him the hidden things within his own heart that were displeasing his Master. shortcomings, failures, mistakes that would hinder his own perfect wholeness. He was fully aware of the sophisticated cunning of man's nature and wanted God's eye on the depths within himself. In this way he was to keep himself well and healthy while ministering to others.

'Can two walk together, except they be agreed?' Amos 3.

How can we walk in loving communion and fellowship with the Holy Spirit unless we agree with God and with his words as well as his ways.

3. Fear of Death

The thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, cried Job (7:1). We can all feel like this if allowed when we consider incurable diseases. It is true, as it says in Hebrews 2:15 'through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.' We spend all our life being afraid of dying, being afraid to think about it and to think it through. What particular part of death? Probably the actual physical matter of how. I am not very pleased with the idea of a violent death for myself or anyone else. Some, however, do have to go to God in that way, catapulted up hastily so to speak.

There is a course of lectures on how to help a bereaved person at the time of the death of a love one. Nothing much is said about how to face it for ourselves. Fear should not be given much house room but still needs to be faced and identified. Authority over it in commanding it to leave in the Name of Jesus may have to be exercised so that nothing of the kind may take root.

'Fear has torment,' says 1 John 4.18 and this can cause such dispeace as to foster illness. Being unable to accept the reality of life after death or to adjust to a life where our relatives are missing may mean we have lost a proper sense of the wonder and excitement of what it will be like up there,. How will it seem to go to bed in one room and wake up in another? Could death be worse, or better?

Did you know that God takes people away sometimes from worse to come? According the Isaiah chapter 57 and verse 1. 'The righteous perish and no man lays it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous are taken away from the evil to come.' What a kind and loving Father.

The old saints called heaven a place 'beyond the eyes horizon', or in other words not somewhere to dread, just a place not too far away.

What we do know is, that it is a place of great beauty and rest and, according to Revelation 22, a place of clear rivers of water and with inexpressible light. We shall surely recognise one another, just as we will recognise our Lord. We shall, actually, be more alive than ever we have been in this life. Nothing will be less and no law of gravity, what a thought.

Some who have glimpsed beyond earth life say the music and the beauty and colour cannot be described. We will certainly not want to leave.

Death is a part of life and not some ghastly mistake. It is to be expected and prepared for and not an unwelcome intrusion.

Spiritual growth and maturity is the ability to worship God in all circumstances and accepting death is really a very important activity towards real wholeness, the perfect way to complete health.

Can we say with Paul, 'To die is gain'? Is it actually better than our plum lifestyle and extravagant living? Can we trust God this far?

'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him', said Job (13.15) This was his cry when he really thought the end of everything he knew had really come. But once he had been able to say 'I know that my Redeemer lives, and though worms destroy this body, yet, in my flesh, I shall see God.' (19.25,26) after that, it was as though no amount of talk from his friends or anyone trying their best to help, made any difference.

Job could see another world, where his eyes had beheld the glory of the Risen Lord. Resurrection life made everything else so faint and dim. His fears took wings. He was so thrilled within his spirit he could almost stand again instead of lying in a crumpled heap on a dunghill. His soul and spirit were receiving healing from that moment on, his body could take as long as it liked. Job knew that all was well again. His revelation had restored his soul and there were still over twenty more chapters in the book.

Job's earthly comforters were speaking from their own religious experience, but when Job received this word of knowledge and spoke prophetically, everything changed. God was in it all and working out his own purposes through it and now Job knew it.

There is still, though, whatever we say, an area of mystery when something dreadful happens to us like sickness unto death. And it is probably, like Job, that God is intent on taking all the dross from the gold and doing it in front of a great cloud of witnesses.

Maybe we are too strong for God. This was dear Job's trouble. His good works and character were well known long before his calamities. He was a very great man, an authority among his contemporaries. But the Son of Man became very weak upon the cross and his strength now becomes perfect in our weakness.

Not long ago, there lived in an Oxford Nursing Home, a lady of ninety-three. She was so crippled with arthritis that she couldn't move. She was also totally blind. All who visited her were intent on bringing some comfort or to think of some way in which they could help to ease her suffering. Soothing words were not to her liking however, and it was never long before the visitor would be asked to state three things of utmost importance to themselves. She would then tell them that they could count on her prayers about these matters three times a day until the problems were resolved. She was intent on doing her Father's will no matter what state she found herself in. Weak and on her way to heaven, fruit bearing was going to continue to the end. God does not want us to wait until we are in our nineties to find the spiritual life to be stronger than the physical.

Cult Chaos

God is a jealous God. He has asked us not to bow down or serve any graven image or heathen deity. This included spiritualism, black magic and all to do with the occult. It is more than asking, it is a commandment and becomes a promise prefixed with the phrase, 'Thou shalt not'. Exodus 20.4,5

The Lord our God, the same Israel's Jehovah, who brought them out of Egypt and out of bondage, has the right to command that we shall have no other gods. If we do, if we insist on having other gods, then our iniquities will be passed down to the third and fourth generation. To worship other gods would be to express hatred toward Jehovah, the One True God. That cannot be tolerated. All forms of occultism are quite simply punishable by death. Exodus 22.18 tells us not to suffer a witch to live.

It is pointed out that Saul, although he was the chosen king and also one who actually prophesied, was instrumental in his own early death ---

'So Saul died for his disobedience to the Lord and because he consulted a
a medium, and did not ask the Lord for guidance.' 1

Chronicles 10.13

He died in battle but it was premature.

The trouble is, by so doing, we open a door for demonic activity. This is the end result of involvement in religious error of any degree.

Cults also, like Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, New Age Philosophy and others, deny the need for the blood of Christ to cleanse from sin and provide the only way of salvation. These, including lodges and societies, use religion but omit the atonement. They, therefore, can be said (some of them) to be

seeking guidance to gain supernatural control apart from God Himself. We can include activities like seances, witchcraft, white as well as black, the ouija board, handwriting analysis and ESP, astrology, divination and horoscopes. If it is an abomination to Him, it is also to us.

Entanglement and infatuation with such things can be brought out into the light of His word and openly confessed and repented of and thereby dealt with. If we are talking about our need for healing we must surely be honest. If we recognise our need for cleansing and deliverance and His provision for our redemption all is well.

‘Let us loathe ourselves and all the evils committed,’ says Ezekiel in 20.43 and learn to say with David -

‘I acknowledge my sin unto You, and my iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; and You forgave the iniquity of my sin.’ Psalm 32.5

The bottom line is that we must all die. Except the Lord comes first most of us will go through this experience. We will expire.

What we must not do is go, even to heaven, before our right time. Why should we go too early? We want to fulfil all our potential and we can still do that in our eighties and nineties. But there is such a thing as injury time in the Christian experience. Is this what King Hezekiah was given? A massive lump of fifteen years life extension when he cried to God in his illness.

Why do we try to wriggle out of what God is doing before he has finished? It’s all too much. Too painful. Too long. If He should suddenly release us from the cross like suffering and say, ‘It’s finished at last,’ we might, just might, have some passing regret and say ‘It’s too soon, I haven’t come to the place where I can praise you steadfastly in it.’ Be sure that His work and purpose is complete and then He will show that none of the time has been wasted.

Our eyes are eventually turned away from ourselves to Him. We look forward to meeting Him. His presence and our exquisite enjoyment of it are beyond all our efforts and prayers for healing. One day we shall see Him and be like Him, as He is.

‘Now all I know is hazy and blurred, but then I will see everything clearly, just as clearly as God sees into my heart right now.’ 1 Corinthians 13.12

He is the perfection and completion of all beauty and wholeness. He is described in the book of Revelation as very beautiful. His is a comeliness that has never been seen.

As the men of the Bible tried to describe Him, their own comeliness and strength departed from them. Physical health fled at His presence. If we have more

strength and health than to lie prostrate at His feet now, we certainly will not have then.

However frail, let us turn our eyes and our spiritual insight, to look at Him, whether we are weak, disfigured, maimed or just sick. He will never leave us and loves and sees us as His bride, perfect and whole and very, very lovely. We are completely accepted by Him, unconditionally, whatever our condition right now, this minute - and we are exceedingly comely in His sight.

We adorn the gospel like the flowers would adorn a room. See Titus 1.10
Be certain of it.

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