



Talking about

disability, church and faith

Healing 1: Does Jesus Heal Today?

By Craig Millward

***Note:** This is the first of a series of three articles looking at how we understand the healing accounts in the Gospels and the Christian healing ministry today. The article below is based on my own experience. The second post examines the evidence that Jesus was fully aware that healing was a thorny topic and the final one suggests a reason why this might be the case.*

It was at university that I had my first encounter with Christians who believed that Jesus was still healing people, and that physical healing was a possibility for me.

I had become part of a city-centre Anglican church which was known to be a centre of charismatic renewal. One Sunday evening, in response to a word of knowledge, I found myself at the front of the church being prayed for by members of the prayer team. Despite the fact that the word of knowledge I responded to had nothing to do with my disability I soon discovered that members of the prayer team believed God had told them that my arms were going to grow to normal length and strength as a result of prayer. We prayed. In fact a team prayed for me on many subsequent occasions. Nothing happened except that I became increasingly confused and self-conscious.

Looking back it is clear to me now how vulnerable we are when we come to believe something with a deep and durable conviction. In my own case I was led along by others who believed God had something for me that was apparently not the case. Those several months of seeking God for a miracle we believed had been promised but never came led to deep disillusionment and eventually depression. As my psychological defences against further disappointment became stronger, I began to sit on the edge of worship gatherings. This did not stop others with a similar faith approaching me on numerous further occasions, bringing further confusion and more questions. I even began to fear that my wariness was doing damage to other aspects of my journey of faith.

‘Some people’, writes Brian McLaren, ‘seem to develop an addiction to dramatic experiences that disrupts their life as other addictions would’.¹ Addicts of any kind tend to be self-deluded and manipulative and I have met so many who seek a healing ministry in order to add credibility to themselves or their ‘ministry’. The problem with miracles, if ‘problem’ is the right word to use, is that they can lead us to place too much attention upon the possibility of ‘gifted’ people impacting other ‘less gifted’ recipients without the need for a long-term relationship that is necessary for true discipleship to become possible. Jesus, I believe, wants to create close connections between people that result in changes that are, arguably, more profound than restored bodies.

I'm honestly not sure what I believe about the possibility of physical healing today. Jesus seemed to do all he could to ensure that the miracles that flowed from him spoke of purity of heart and the love of God. I conclude that a truly Christ-like community must be ruthless in making such pure love its primary goal and that our definition of healing must include far more profound experiences than restored bodies. For that reason, I have written two more posts on this theme in the hope that, if there are lessons to learn, we might learn them from him.

Discussion Questions

- How do you define healing after reading this post?
- How do you feel about expressing honest doubts alongside faith?
- How can healing best be experienced within a Christian community?

1 Brian D McLaren – *Naked Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2011), 16.