CHAPTER ONE

QUESTIONS ABOUT HEALING MINISTRY

1. WHY HAVE A HEALING SERVICE?

Some may say, “Should not every worship service be a healing experience? What is the point of having a special healing service?” Although it is true that whenever two or three or more gather in the name of Jesus Christ many good things happen, the average Sunday morning worship service does not focus specifically on healing. Just as we have special emphasis on evangelism, music, stewardship, education, missions, and social concerns, we need to have specific times to center on healing ministry. When Jesus sent out his disciples two by two (Luke 9:1-2), he commanded them to heal in his name. This directive from Jesus was meant not only for the early church, but also for the church today (John 14:12-14). Regularly scheduled healing services proclaim to the congregation and to the surrounding community that God is on the side of good health and welcomes all who seek help, hope, and healing.

2. WHAT TO CALL THIS MINISTRY?

This significant ministry goes by several labels: faith healing, divine healing, spiritual healing, and Christian healing. Because
each of these names can be widely or narrowly interpreted, the preferred designation by many is simply, “The Healing Ministry of Christ.” Whatever you call this health-enhancing, vital ministry; you will need to provide educational settings for clarification, understanding, and acceptance. Teaching ministry and healing ministry go together.

3. WHAT IS CHRIST-CENTERED HEALING MINISTRY?

Christians do not have a monopoly on healing. God loves and cares for the whole world, Christians and non-Christians alike. God has unlimited avenues for healing, many ways of curing the illnesses of humankind. Health care professionals, religious as well as nonreligious, are engaged in various aspects of healing ministry even though God’s grace and benevolence may not be acknowledged. What is unique for Christians in the healing process is the presence and power of the risen Christ, who not only instructed his followers after Easter to continue all of his ministries (teaching, preaching, healing), but he also promised, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18-20). Healing ministry is not magic, sleight of hand, or hocus-pocus.

Rather, it is biblically based, holistic in scope, and Christ-centered. By genuine acts of faith and confidence Christians affirm and call on Christ-the-Healer to do the healing ministry through us, in us, and among us.

4. IS HEALING MINISTRY A SUBSTITUTE FOR MEDICINE?

Although healing ministry often results in restored physical health, this is not a substitute for medicine or surgery. Healing
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ministry makes no claims to prescribe in the arenas of psychology, psychiatry, medical procedures, and medicine, but does work closely with persons in these professions. Increasing numbers in the medical community realize and appreciate the therapeutic value of religious faith. God uses countless ways of providing good health. As a medical doctor said so well, “God is our primary physician and all the doctors on earth are junior partners.” Combining the best spiritual care with the best medical care is highly recommended.

5. WHAT IS MEANT BY HEALING PRAYER?

Healing prayer means using prayer as a spiritual therapy in healing the whole person (body, mind, spirit, and relationships). Those who pray take seriously the spiritual dimension in the healing process. Out of obedience to Christ and compassion for others intentional prayers for healing can be incorporated into the life of every church. Intercessory prayer groups are on the front line in healing ministry. Any expansion of prayer ministries within the local church provides the necessary foundation for effective healing ministries. Prayer ministry is healing ministry; healing ministry is prayer ministry. However, keep in mind that prayer does not heal; prayer connects us with God, the source of health and wholeness. When we pray for healing, we are not in a begging posture; rather we are coming to God with an attitude of cooperation, gratitude and receptivity in the healing process.

6. WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WHO SERVE ON PRAYER TEAMS?

The healing ministry instructions recorded in James 5:14 direct those who are ill to “call for the elders of the church and
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have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.” The term “elders” literally means “church leaders.” One interpretation suggests that the elders are those Christians who give evidence of personal growth in the mind and spirit of Christ. Lay and clergy members of the church community who believe that Christ is alive and able to touch, help, and heal today just as in the New Testament era, volunteer to serve on prayer teams. These spiritual leaders have no special power or healing ability, but combine their personal faith in the healing Christ with a genuine compassion for people. Any healing that occurs comes by way of the love and grace of God in Christ.

7. What Is the Role of Faith in Healing?

Faith is critical in healing; however, having faith in faith is not helpful. What counts is placing one’s personal trust, belief, and faith in God, our Divine Physician. A close examination of every healing story of Jesus in the four gospels reveals that faith in God to heal is present in someone. The faith of the person seeking help is not always known, but Jesus consistently manifests faith. Medical research in our day is demonstrating the positive effects of faith in God, especially during surgical procedures and life-threatening illnesses. The role of faith is crucial; and the more we exercise our personal faith in God, who cares and heals, the better the results.

8. Are Spiritual Gifts Necessary for Healing Ministry?

The Holy Spirit endows all Christians with gifts for ministry. The New Testament names at least twenty different spiritual gifts. Christians are encouraged to discover and use their various gifts in building up the Body of Christ. However, gifts of healing
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(1 Corinthians 12:9) are not a requirement for effective healing ministry. Gifts of healing are a plus but not a prerequisite. The healing ministry of the church is primarily a ministry of obedience to Christ and of compassion for people. Underline and remember this affirmation by a Presbyterian minister who has had many years of experience conducting healing services: “It is not our ability but our availability that is desired. Jesus Christ will do the work and supply the power” (Donald Bartow, The Healing Service [Canton, Ohio: Life Enrichment Publishers, 1976], 15).

9. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ANOINTING WITH OIL?

In the Bible, oil was at times used as a medicinal agent (Isaiah 1:6 and Luke 10:34). Jesus instructed the disciples to anoint with oil when they prayed for healing, as recorded in Mark 6:13. The often-quoted instructions in James 5:13-16 are quite clear in calling the spiritual leaders of the church to pray with the sick and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. The oil does not do the healing; rather, being anointed with oil reminds us of the healing presence of Christ. Today Christians interpret anointing with oil as an authentic biblical symbol for healing ministry.

10. WHY LAY ON HANDS IN HEALING MINISTRY?

“The early Christians employed the laying on of hands in . . . ordination [ceremonies], in the commissioning of missionaries, in receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and in healing” ministry. “According to the Gospel records, Jesus did not hesitate to use physical touch in communicating God’s love . . . when he sensed that would be appropriate . . . Because of the obvious biblical precedent, coupled with our natural desire to reach out to
people in need, we should not hesitate to touch gently and lovingly those who ask for healing prayer with laying on of hands” (Wagner, An Adventure in Healing and Wholeness, 98, 97, and 99).

11. WHEN HEALING DOES NOT HAPPEN, THEN WHAT?

This frequently raised question usually indicates the disappointment of not being healed physically. What some might label as failure in healing ministry often disregards spiritual health, mental/emotional health, and healthy relationships. Although a specific cure may not happen, other kinds of healings can be experienced. Actually, there are no total failures and absolute disappointments according to those who actively participate in healing ministry. All are blessed in helpful ways. Hope replaces fear. Resentments melt away. Worry is vanquished. Sins are forgiven. Guilt is erased. Broken lives are mended. The inner peace of God is present. When improved physical health is not experienced, for whatever reason, God is faithful and blesses us in other areas of our life and being.

12. AFTER RECEIVING PRAYERS FOR HEALING, WHAT SHOULD I EXPECT?

Just relax and give God time to work. When we plant a garden we do not pull up our seedlings every day to see how much they have grown. Adopt this same attitude with spiritual therapy. Sometimes prayers for healing are answered very quickly and sometimes quite gradually. God’s health care plan is to heal the whole person, not just the part that hurts. If we become impatient with the healing process, remember that our timing is not always the same as God’s. Our role is to remain faithful, patient, and fully trusting in God’s good will for health and wholeness.