

Gifts of Healings

Text 1 Cor.12:7-11; James 5:14-18

Sermon Statement

Jesus continues his ministry using signs and wonders through the church today. The giving of spiritual gifts have not ceased. The gifts of healings and prayers of faith are for the healing of the sick. Supernatural healings are rare. God works healing through natural means.

Introduction

Healing or rather the gifts of healings has generated a lot of interest recently. I shall begin by differentiating healing into (1) spiritual, (2) emotional, and (3) physical or organic. Spiritual healing is in our reconciliation with God through the Cross and allows us to enjoy eternal life with Christ. Emotional healing is when our deep inner emotional wounds are being deal with. Physical or organic healing is healing of diseases that affect our bodies. This is usually the type of healing referred to when people talk about healing. It is also referred to as divine healing, miracles, or signs and wonders. I shall refer to it as 'supernatural' healing as opposed to natural healing that takes place with the help of medical treatment. I will define supernatural healing as **an extraordinary healing event wrought by God through a human agency, an event that cannot be explained by natural laws and forces**. This is a modified definition of miracles given by pastor-theologian John MacArthur in his book, *The Charismatic Chaos*.

I shall approach this subject from the perspective of a doctor who has been studying the subject of supernatural healing for more than 30 years and I have four whole shelves of books to prove it. I shall also approach it from the perspective of a clinician who deals with life and death situations in the lives of patients for the same period.

We shall approach this subject by asking questions:

- (1) Does God heal?
- (2) Does God heal today?
- (3) How does God heals today?

(1) Does God heal?

The Old Testament shows that God heals either directly or through men. Reproduced below is an interesting list reproduced from pastor-theologian Richard Mayhue, Dean Professor of Theology and Pastoral Ministries, The Masters University from his book, *The Healing Promise*.

The Old Testament

The Healing Ministry of God Directly

1. Genesis 21:1 – Sarah
2. Genesis 29:31 – Leah
3. Genesis 30:22 – Rachel
4. Exodus 4: 6-7 – Moses
5. 1 Samuel 1:19-20 – Hannah
6. 1 Samuel 6:3 – Philistines
7. 2 Kings 13:21 – unknown man
8. 2 Chronicles 30:20 – Israel
9. Job 42 – Job

The Old Testament

The Healing Ministry of God Through Men

1. Genesis 20:17 -Abimelech, his wife and maids
2. Numbers 12:1-15 – Miriam
3. Numbers 16:41-50 – Israel
4. Numbers 21: 4-9 – Israel
5. Numbers 25: 1-9 – Israel
6. 2 Samuel 24: 1-17 – Israel
7. 1 Kings 13:4-6 – Jeroboam
8. 1 Kings 17: 17-24 – widow’s son
9. 2 Kings 4: 18-37 –Shunammite’s son
10. 2 Kings 5: 1-14 – Naaman
11. 2 Kings 20:1-11 – Hezekiah

From the time of Abraham (about 2200 B.C.) to the time of Isaiah (about 750 B.C.) there are only 20 specific healing incidents.

- Time of Job and Abraham (5)
- Moses (5)
- Samuel (2)
- David to Isaiah (8)

From 750 B.C. there were no recorded healings until the time of Christ. We would have expected more healing incidents in the Old Testament. Using the Synoptic Gospels, there are 29 recorded incidents of Jesus’ healing of individuals and 13 incidents of Jesus’ healing of ‘multitudes.’ Altogether there were 42 healings events.

Dr Brad Burke, in his book, *Does God Still Do Miracles?* noted the characteristics of Jesus' healing ministry.

1. **Christ healed completely**
2. **Christ healed immediately**

Except for three instances where healing takes a few minutes, all healing takes place instantaneously.

3. **Christ healed in public**

No healing rallies.

4. **Christ healed mostly visible organic disease**
5. **Christ healed even those without faith**

Jesus healed a man of blindness who didn't even know he is (John 9:25)

JN 9:25 He replied, "Whether he is a sinner or not, I don't know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!"

6. **Christ healed with a purpose**

- To authenticate his claim to be the messiah (John 5:36)

JN 5:36 "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the very work that the Father has given me to finish, and which I am doing, testifies that the Father has sent me.

- Show that he has authority to forgive sin (Matt. 9:6-8)

⁶ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." ⁷ And the man got up and went home. ⁸ When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

- Prove that his message is from God (Acts 2:22)

AC 2:22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.

- Give Glory to God and launch the church (Eph. 2:19-22; John 11:4)

EPH 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy

temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

^{JN 11:4} When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it."

- Jesus didn't heal everyone who was sick (John 5:3-5)

³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie--the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

- Jesus did not heal on demand (Matt.12:38-40)

^{MT 12:38} Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

^{MT 12:39} He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah ⁴⁰ For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth

Jesus healed with a purpose. He did not seek to heal everybody he meets.

(2) Does God still heal today?

Because Jesus is unique, there are many respected pastors and theologians who suggested that spiritual gifts ended with the time of the early church. Part of their argument is that signs and wonders appeared at three times in history and during the rest of the time they were not available. John Piper quoted a respected popular pastor, who says,

According to Scripture, miracles or signs and wonders occurred in three major periods: the days of Moses and Joshua, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Christ and the apostles. Each of these periods lasted something less than one hundred years, but in each period there was a proliferation of miracles. Miracles were the norm. God can interject Himself into the stream of history supernaturally any time He wishes. But it seems that He chose to limit Himself essentially to these three periods.

In each of these periods God allows signs and wonders to show his power and glory. Now that the church has been established, there is no longer need for signs and wonders and the Holy Spirit has cease giving out spiritual gifts.

While some argued that gifts ended with the times of the apostles, there are others who argued that it ended with the final canon of the New Testament when the full revelation of God has been given.

Some of these pastors and theologians include

- John Calvin
- Martin Luther
- John Owen
- Jonathan Edwards
- George Whitefield
- Charles Spurgeon
- Benjamin Warfield
- John MacArthur

Personally I am not convinced that miracles or signs and wonders ended with the apostolic age.

In John 14:12 Jesus said

¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

“these” means the miracles that Jesus has been doing. This implies that Jesus sees continuity between himself and his disciples. There is continuity between Jesus’ ministry and the church’s ministry. And how will he ensure that? Jesus will send the Holy Spirit who will give spiritual gifts (John 14:16-17)

¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever-- ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.

The Holy Spirit or Counselor will equip the church with spiritual gifts so that the church may manifest signs and wonders. Again, like Jesus, the manifestation of signs and wonders is to bring **glory to the Father** and not for individual gain.

(3) How does God heals today?

1. Spiritual Gifts

What are Spiritual Gifts for?

1 Cor 12:7-11

^{1CO 12:7} Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.

The different spiritual gifts listed are:

- Gift of wisdom
- Gift of knowledge
- Gift of faith
- Gifts of healing
- Gift of miraculous power
- Gift of prophecy
- Gift of distinguishing between spirits
- Gift of tongues
- Gift of interpretation of tongues

There are many more spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit. Note that these spiritual gifts or manifestation of the Spirit is given for the **common good** of the community of faith or the church.

Jesus continues his ministry using signs and wonders through the church today. The giving of spiritual gifts has not ceased. The gifts of healing and ‘prayer of faith’ are for the sick.

Later in 1Cor 12:12-26, Paul uses the analogy of a human body to show how the parts fit together and how each part is essential to the proper functioning of the body.

Each gift is independent of each other but interdependent on one another. Paul goes on to say in 1 Cor 12:27-28 thus emphasizing the uniqueness of each gift and the important role each gift have to the church.

^{1CO 12:27} Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

The Holy Spirit “he gives them to each one, just as he determines” meaning that gifts are given. We may ask for it but it is the Spirit who decides who to give his gifts to.

Can we heal ‘supernaturally’ as Jesus does?

Here are some of John Piper's comments "Jesus was the embodiment of the kingdom. He was the King. His demonstration of the kingdom was unique. Believers may do the kind of works he did (John 14:12), but there will always remain a uniqueness about the way he did them. And we should not assume that our demonstration of the kingdom and Jesus' demonstration of the kingdom will be the same."

For example, when Jesus turned the water into wine, John says, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory" (John 2:11). And that glory John tells us is the glory as of the only Son of the Father (John 1:14). Therefore I think it is wrong to say that the signs and wonders wrought by Jesus are simply the work of a Spirit-filled man that we can copy in the same measure if we will only be Spirit-filled. John said that when Jesus demonstrated power he did it in a way that manifested his glory. There was an inseparable connection between the signs of Jesus and the glorious Sonship of Jesus.

Therefore the gifts of healing we receive from the Spirit may not be similar to those which Jesus manifested. The gifts of prophecy we receive are different from the gift of prophecy of the Old Testament prophets. And Jesus did not speak in tongues nor interpret tongues.

Can we interpret the gifts of healing to the supernatural healing done by Jesus?

This is an important question because it will impact how we understand the role of healing in the church and in the healing ministries. This is especially relevant in our understanding of 'miracle' rallies and 'healing' houses.

In the NIV it is translated as "gifts of healing" but in the NKJ and NASB it is translated as "gifts of healings."

Pentecostal New Testament scholar Gordon Fee in his commentary *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT) notes that the gifts of healings,

Probably this language reflects two things: (a) The use of charisma itself suggests that the "manifestation" is given not to the person who is healed, but to the person God uses for the healing of another, (b) the plural charismata probably suggest not a permanent "gift" as it were, but that each occurrence is a "gift" in its own right. (p.594)

Pastor John Piper concur and notes, "the phrase "gifts of healings" (two plurals) in 1 Corinthians 12:9 and 28 suggests rather that at different times for different sicknesses God gives to different people different "gifts of healings."

Therefore the gifts of healings is not a permanent gift but given by the Holy Spirit specifically for certain people at certain time. This call into question people who claim to be faith healers and have a permanent gift of healing to heal all type of diseases.

In other words, you might find yourself drawn to pray for one person with remarkable, expectant faith and see that person healed, but then pray for others and not experience that same gift.” Obviously this is different from Jesus’ healing ministry which is supernatural in nature.

If the gifts of healings are different from Jesus’ type of supernatural healing, so does supernatural healings still occurs?

I have been searching for 30 years and I have yet to come across a single case of what I call supernatural healing - **an extraordinary healing event wrought by God through a human agency, an event that cannot be explained by natural laws and forces.** I have been asking my oncologist friends to inform me if they come across any cases that they are satisfied is a supernatural healing and cannot be explained away by medical sciences. None. Two years ago I was invited by a Christian Doctor Organisation to attend a meeting in Sweden to present certified cases of supernatural healing. I did not attend because I did not have any cases to report.

Dr Brad Burke in his book, *Does God Still Do Miracles?* suggests only one patient whom he suspect may be supernaturally healed by God. He personally investigated Benny Hinn’s crusades and interviewed Benny Hinn.

He wrote to Dr Paul Brand, a pioneer in hand surgery with leprosy patients in India and Paul replied in his extensive experience, he has not come across a single patient that he can claimed to be supernaturally healed. Another doctor who shares Dr Brand’s view is C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon-General of the United States.

American surgeon, Dr Nolen investigated Kathryn Kuhlman’s claims by her healing ministries but could not come up with any documented cases. He volunteered to be an usher in her crusade. He wrote a book about this – *Healing, A Doctor in Search of a Miracle.*

Lourdes in France is a pilgrimage place for healing. Since 1858 there have been many claims of supernatural healings. Every year five million people visited the shrine to the Virgin Mary for healing. The Roman Catholic Church set up a medical board to examine these claims. Out of 6,000 healings claims, only 66 were authenticated by the doctors on the board. It is interesting to note that in the last forty years (where about 20 millions people have visited), there are only 4 confirmed claims. Does this means that the claims decrease as medical science improves?

What I am trying to show here is that God still heals supernaturally. I strongly believe that God still heals supernatural. However I am of the opinion that he prefers to use other ‘natural’ ways of healing. Supernatural healings occurs but very rarely.

What happens during a faith-healing service?

- Incredible optimism

- The ‘battlefield anesthesia’ effect
- Power of suggestion
- Clearing the mind
- Strong desire to please

All this may contribute to the many testimonies of healing we hear about.

Like all spiritual gifts, the temptation for self-glorification and making the gift their “god” is very strong. We all have heard stories of abuses. Those who have the gift or gifts of healing and have developed a fruitful healing ministry is especially vulnerable. Like all ministry leaders they are prone to fall. Satan will like nothing better than to see a leader fall. Satan can also produce counterfeit healings. The danger signs are when the ‘gifted healer’ exhorts their gift over the Giver.

- They begin to see themselves as the key to their ministry.
- They add or reinterpret the bible to fit their experiences while giving lip service to God.
- They regard medical doctors as agents of the Satan.

Will everyone be healed?

Paul provides an example in his life. He is able to heal

- the crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:10)
- many people in Ephesus (Acts 19:12)
- demonized girl in Philippi (Acts 16:18)
- Eutychus (Acts 20:9-10)

Paul was not able to heal

- His thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:8-9)
- His sickness in Galatia (Gal.4: 13-14)
- Timothy of his stomach problems (1 Tim. 5:23)
- Epaphroditus - life threatening illness (Phil.2:26-27)
- Trophimus (2 Tim.4:20)

Paul, however, did not elaborate further about the types of gifts of healing. Whenever we receive a sense that we need to pray for the healing of someone, we should follow that prompt and pray. It is a gift and those who have the gifts should use it.

Is the Gift of Tongues essential to the Gifts of Healing?

The gift of tongue is the most exciting and enticing of the spiritual gifts and the Corinthians had taken to it with much gusto. This led Paul to comment on it in details in 1 Cor 14:1-18.

¹CO 14:1 Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. ² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God. Indeed, no one understands him; he

utters mysteries with his spirit. ³ But everyone who prophesies speaks to men for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort. ⁴ He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. ⁵ I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy. He who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues, unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

^{1CO 14:6} Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? ⁷ Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? ⁸ Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? ⁹ So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. ¹⁰ Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. ¹¹ If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me. ¹² So it is with you. Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church.

^{1CO 14:13} For this reason anyone who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret what he says. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind; I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind. ¹⁶ If you are praising God with your spirit, how can one who finds himself among those who do not understand say "Amen" to your thanksgiving, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ You may be giving thanks well enough, but the other man is not edified.

^{1CO 14:18} I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ But in the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Note that no where did Paul link the gift of tongues to the gifts of healing. Each has their specific role as Paul notes in 1 Cor 12: 28

²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues.

2. Prayers of faith

It is worth noting that James did not call for people with healing gifts in James 5:14-18. Did you ever ask why not? Why call for the elders? I believe there is another element for healing in our churches, that of prayer.

James 5:14-18

^{JAS 5:13} Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise¹⁴ Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.¹⁷ Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

There are three types of prayers here:

- Praying for ourselves (v.13)

- Praying for the sick (v.14, 15)
- Praying for one another other (v.16)

Paul goes on to reassure us that God listens to prayer. He uses the example of Elijah as “a man just like us” (James 5:17). By his prayers Israel suffered a three and a half year drought. And also by his prayers, the rain came.

It is interesting to note that James writes “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well” (James 5:15a). A ‘prayer in faith’ seems to be a condition for healing. I will like to suggest that the key for an effective prayer for healing is a gift of faith that God will heal this person. This leads us back to 1 Cor 12:9. and spiritual gifts.

John Piper notes,

“It seems to me that what we have in Mark 11:23-24 and 1 Corinthians 12:9 and 13:2 and James 5:15 is an unbroken line of teaching about a gift of faith that enables a person to pray a completely assured prayer because God has given extraordinary assurance. This is why the "prayer of faith" in James 5:15 WILL heal the sick person. It is certain because this faith is God's special gift of assurance about what he intends to do.”

Note that the faith required is that of the elders and not the person prayed for. Many persons who did not receive healing get a dose of bad theology by being told that they do not have enough faith.

3. Community of believers

An important component of healing is the loving fellowship of a community of Christians.

Paul continues his teaching on spiritual gifts in 1 Cor. 12 and 13.

^{1CO 12:14} Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

^{1CO 12:21} The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

^{1CO 12:27} Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having

gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

^{1CO 13:1} If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

He uses the metaphor of a body to describe the community of Christ. He talks about foot, hand, eyes, head and how each need each other and is integral to the survival of the body. Then he brings in the spiritual gifts as equivalent to the organs of the body. Finally he ties it together with the word 'love.'

Our bodies are created to be self healing. It is a wonderful creation. So the community of Christ is also healing. The powerful of healing comes from love. Love manifested as care and concern for one another as described in 1 Cor. 13.

4. Improvement in healthcare

It is not a lack of faith to see to seek medical help when you are sick. Nowhere in the Bible were we forbidden to seek the services of doctors. God who created our wonderful bodies also created the natural laws that heal these bodies. Doctors, nurses, pharmacist and other healthcare professionals are only using these natural laws created by God to help in our healings.

John R. Rice observes in *Healing in Answer to Prayers*,

“God can save a sinner without use of any human aid, but certainly He does not usually do so. If God can use a man, with consecrated wisdom and love and skill in winning a soul, why should he not use a doctor, a pharmacist, or a nurse with their consecrated skill in healing the sick?”

That is an important point. God uses people to evangelise or share the gospel. S why not in doing his work of healing of bodies?

I believe that God is still healing people today. I believe that he can intervene supernaturally. However he chose not to but allow healing through the principles of natural laws that he has created.

Lessons for us

- (1) Jesus' ministry of signs and wonders continues to this day (by his church)
- (2) The ministry of signs and wonders glorifies God alone
- (3) The Holy Spirit equips different people with different spiritual gifts
- (4) We should seek for spiritual gifts

- (5) Those with the gifts of healing should exercise their spiritual gifts
- (6) We should all pray for the sick
- (7) Those who are sick should also see a medical doctor (who utilize the natural laws of God's creation)
- (8) God is sovereign

Closing hymn: Our God Reigns

Soli Deo Gloria

8 November 2009