

Part 2 - Ministering Divine Healing

In this section we look at the practicalities of ministering healing. I start with a short Quick-Start and Trouble-shooting section making short assertions which I frequently remind myself of to steady my faith for healing and outlying my approach if nothing seems to have happened. This is followed by a longer section looking at the ways Jesus ministered healing, at the significance of Jesus statement, "According to your faith you will be healed", and finally looking in more depth at dealing with disappointment.

Quick-Start — Faith for Healing

Jesus healed every disease and sickness for everyone who came to Him (**Mt 9:35**).

Jesus commissioned us to heal every disease (**Lk 10:9**).

Everyone who came to the apostles were healed (**Acts 5:16**).

Jesus never refused to heal nor sent anyone away sick.

There was nothing in Jesus' ministry to suggest that healing was special to Him, and everything to assure us that He meant healing to be a ministry of all believers (**Mk 16:18**).

There was nothing in Jesus' ministry to suggest that healing was special to His generation and that the rest of us would have to wait for heaven, and everything to suggest that healing was a universally available reality in God's Kingdom on earth now "The Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins to rescue us *from the present evil age*, according to the will of our God and Father" (**Gal 1:3-5** see also **Lk 10:9, Jn 20:21**).

Dreaming up excuses for God is not pleasing to God. We often imagine reasons why God might not answer our prayer and if the answer does not come immediately we dream up possible reasons why God has not answered. Jesus does not commend this nor suggest any possible reasons for delay, on the contrary He says we should come as little children with simple unquestioning faith (**Lk 18:17**).

Jesus has not given us a single reason for doubting that God will heal when we pray, or grant us our request. Every one of Jesus' teachings and encouragements is designed to give us confidence that God will answer our prayers and heal when we minister healing (**Jn 14:12-14**).

His reprimands are only ever directed towards those who fail to believe and trust that God will do as we request and never towards those who ask God for anything (**Matt 8:26**).

The scriptures reprimands are not directed against those who ask or expect too much, but against those who ask and expect too little.

The scriptures reprimands are not directed against those who boast about God too much, but against those who boast too little:

"My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice." (**Ps 34:2**)

"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." (**Mt 10:32-33**)

Please God by keeping on asking and seeking and knocking until you obtain your request. This is not pestering God or trying to twist His arm, it is demonstrating faith in His promise that those who keep on asking will soon receive. God is very pleased when He sees us believing what Jesus said!

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him." (**1Jo 5:14**)

If you want to please God, then be a believer! God is pleased with confident faith that presumes God will grant our request (**Heb 11:6**). If you have prayed then be determined to please God by believing and keeping on believing that God has granted your request and that soon you will receive it.

There is such joy and peace in believing. "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (**Rom 15:13**) So meditate on the

promises. Imitate Jeremiah: “thy words were found, and I ate them, and thy words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart; for I am called by thy name, O LORD, God of hosts.” (**Jer 15:16** RSV). Doubting is a miserable pastime!

Trouble-shooting — when ‘nothing’ happens

The biggest obstacle to healing is unbelief - our fear that nothing will happen. My strategy is to make sure that that is God’s problem, not mine. I will make my boast in the Lord and be insistent that He is faithful to His word. God’s will is not in doubt. He has heard me and answered me, not because of my righteousness, but for Jesus’ sake. The only excuse I will allow is that I am not yet fully Christ like. If Jesus were here in person He would certainly heal.

There can be no doubt that God wants me to deliver healing to the sick. If healing does not come after praying two or three times, then I will ask God for guidance about how to pray or what to do. Sometimes He will reveal hidden sin or demonic activity, sometimes He will give assurance that healing has been given and time must be allowed for its full manifestation. Sometimes He will indicate that prayer must be continued over a period of days or weeks. He may even indicate that medical treatment is how God wants to heal. Or God may indicate some other reason why healing is not released. But I will not be double-minded. I believe God and that is the end of the matter.

The devil will try to get us to accept lower and lower rates of success until we are paralysed with unbelief. We must insist that our expectation is healing for **all** who come. Likewise, the devil would like us to pray more and more times with longer and longer prayers before we see healing. He wants to wear us out and waste our time. Again we must insist that our expectation is full healing after one simple prayer. We must fight for this and not accept deteriorating results. Go for constant improvement.

Whenever we notice we are lacking in faith, ask what are we thinking? Is this something Jesus commends or does He commend a different train of thought? Am I believing Jesus? We must be obedient to Christ, steadfast in faith and give the devil no room or foothold for undermining our confidence in God. “Do not throw away your confidence which has a great reward” (**Heb 10:35**).

Ministering Divine Healing

Jesus ministered healing in a wide variety of ways, although there is no record of Him actually *praying* for healing. There is no one formula for healing ministry and we should not get stuck in one approach, but listen to the Holy Spirit and to the person we are ministering to and chose an appropriate method. Some of the approaches we see in scripture are:

Simple Touch:

The approach most frequently adopted by Jesus was simple touch, often with a word of encouragement.

He touched her hand and the fever left her (**Matt 8:15**).

He went up to her, took her hand and helped her to her feet (**Mk 1:34**).

Jesus stretched out his hand and placed it on the leper saying, “Of course I want to. Be clean!” (**Matt 8:2**)

Then he touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you”; (**Matt 9:29**)

“Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him” (**Mt 20:34**).

“He touched the man’s ear and healed him” (**Lu 22:51**).

These examples show us the simplicity of divine healing. There is no necessity for commanding or even praying. Jesus did not appeal to God for healing power nor ask if it was God’s will. He knew it was the Father’s will to heal and so He acted in assured faith and loving compassion to simply impart healing through a loving touch and a reassuring word. He knew that God always heard Him and would give the healing: “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me” (**Jn 11:41-42**).

We do not need to find suitable sounding words, all we need is confident faith. But often we find that reminding ourselves and the person we are ministering to of God's promises helps us to chase away unbelief.

The Spoken Command

The simple spoken command is frequently seen in both Jesus' and the apostle's ministry.

Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; **(Jn 5:8-9)**

He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sat up and began to talk. **(Lk 7:14-15)**

But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" **(Lk 8:54)**

When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" **(Jn 11:43)**

There he found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and tidy up your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. **(Ac 9:33-34)**

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. **(Ac 14:8-10)**

Occasionally, Jesus used symbolic actions as well as a word of command:

Then he said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." So he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. **(Mt 12:13)**

Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (which means, "Be opened!") **(Mk 7:33-34)**

Note that there is no aggression in the command, nor is it addressed to the sickness, but to the person, commanding that they *do something* which demonstrates their healing. Jesus always used a spoken command when raising the dead! It seems that the words Jesus used were mostly for the benefit of those present, rather than of great significance to the healing itself **(Jn 11:42)**.

It may be that a confident word of command helps impart faith to the recipient (in the case of raising the dead, I take it that the relatives are the recipients). Note that Paul looked for faith in the cripple at Lystra.

In Liberia I told a paralysed boy, Laurence, to stand up. He went to reach for his standing-frame, but I said, "No. Just stand up". So he just stood up! That was the first time he had stood unaided since he was paralysed two years before. A few days later he walked to church on crutches and is making daily progress towards full recovery.

There are times when a command which is not spoken to a person is appropriate. We see this most often when Jesus commands demons to leave. But Jesus also spoke to the fig tree and the storm and He said that if we speak to a mountain with no doubting in our heart then it will be moved. These are not for healings but other types of miracle. When we have a mountainous problem then commanding it to make a way for us is the way to pray.

Reach out to "touch" Jesus:

Several times the gospels record that many were healed simply by touching Him: "the sick just touched the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed" **(Mt 14:36)**. This is perhaps similar to those who were healed simply by having Peter's shadow pass over them **(Acts 5:15)**. Many other Christians down through the centuries have developed such a healing ministry that similar things have happened. This seems to occur when a minister has gained such a reputation for healing that people have firm faith for their own healing and so are healed.

Many are healed without anyone specifically ministering to them, especially in times of worship. The expectation that God will heal on His initiative at any time should be encouraged, but especially in worship

or breaking bread. We should encourage people to reach out to Jesus for healing wherever and whenever the need arises.

Lay hands on the sick:

Twice Luke tells us that Jesus laid His hands on people for healing. It may be that this signifies a more formal prayer or blessing for healing. Certainly, that is what is meant when the term is used by Luke in Acts.

“And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.” (**Lu 13:13**)

Jesus laid his hands on each one of them separately and healed them. (**Lk 4:40**)

Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and he could see again. (**Act 9: 18**)

His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him. (**Ac 28:8**)

Jesus said that as believers “place their hands on the sick” they would recover.

“And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.”(**Mk 16:17-18**)

A gentle touch can convey love and compassion to a person. Laying hands on the sick for healing is the most widely practiced mode of healing but we should not forget the other modes which Jesus practiced. We should also be aware of the warning “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure.” (**1Tim 5:22**) If we suspect a person is unrepentant we should avoid laying hand on them. There is a spiritual identity in laying on of hands, as is seen in the Old Testament practice of laying hands on the head of the scape goat to carry away sins. Although I try to always remember to ask the Lord before laying hands on people, the Lord has only once shown me not to do so and a few other times I have decided not to.

Healing at a distance:

Several times Jesus healed at a distance and there are countless examples of this having happened since.

The royal official said, “Sir, come down before my child dies.” Jesus replied, “You may go. Your son will live.” The man took Jesus at his word and departed. While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.” (**Jn 4:49-51**)

Then Jesus said to the centurion, “Go! It will be done just as you believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that very hour. (**Matt 8:13**)

Then he told her, “For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.” (**Mk 7:29**)

“God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.” (**Ac 19:11-12**)

Nowadays we can pray with people over the phone as another means of bringing healing at a distance. Whilst in Liberia I prayed for a man who had been very sick for some weeks. He was immediately healed. He then told me his sister who lived far away had also been struck down with the same sickness at the same time. We prayed for her and she too recovered.

Anointing for Healing

Jesus’ disciples used anointing oil in healing (presumably at Jesus’ instruction) “They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them” (**Mk 6:13**). It is clear from Acts that this was not the only way that healing was ministered, but it is a method recommended by James:

“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” (**Jas 5:14**).

Oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit and can be a helpful aid to faith and may indeed be a “means of grace” (i.e. made effective by God’s choosing). There is no suggestion that special oil or special prayers are involved.

I would also include breaking bread here as a means of grace for healing. It has been the experience of the church over 2000 years that healing often comes through breaking bread.

Healing delayed

We tend to think that all of Jesus’ healings were instant and complete, but they were not all so.

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And **as they went**, they were cleansed.” (Lu 17:12-15)

Having said this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means Sent). **So the man went** and washed, and came home seeing.” (Jn 9:6-7)

When he had spat on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.” (Mk 8:23-25)

We should not be dismayed if some healing is not instant or is incomplete. There is no shame in praying repeatedly over a period of days or weeks. The main thing is to bring healing.

In Liberia we learnt to pray very simple and short prayers and saw 7 out of 8 people with symptoms report immediate full relief. Very few required more than one prayer – even a deaf lady who received her hearing. However, where healing was not immediately apparent, we prayed again and again until we saw complete healing or were assured that healing would follow. One elderly man who could hardly see received significant improvement each time we prayed, until his sight was fully restored. The first time we prayed for Laurence (mentioned above) there was no apparent healing, but we knew God had answered our prayers. It was a week later that he first stood up.

Maintaining health

Jesus knew that there was often – but not always – an association between sin and sickness. “see, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.” (Jn 5:14). There is also, of course, a close association between life-style and health. If we want to enjoy and remain in good health following divine healing, then we need to attend to any eating or life-style issues that have contributed to our sickness.

In addition, a healthy mind leads to a healthy body. Unforgiveness is known to be a common factor in ill health. Stress and worry are damaging. Confident faith in God and a healthy detachment from the deceitful and empty promises of materialism are good for health.

“My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to a man’s whole body” (Pr 4:20-22).

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Pr 17:22).

Oh you of little faith

There is a lot of confusion over the role of faith, leading most people to feel that faith is like gun powder in a fire work. The more faith you have the further it will go. Small faith can accomplish small things and large faith accomplishes large things. A scripture like this may encourage such a view:

Jesus said to the blind men, "According to your faith you will be healed"; and their sight was restored **(Mt 9:27-30)**.

But contrast this with:

I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." **(Matt 17:20)**.

We must be careful to learn from Jesus and the scriptures, not from our own assumptions. The Greek word *pistis* is translated either as "faith" or "belief"; they are one and the same word, derived from the word meaning "convince" (i.e. persuade that something is either true or false). Whenever reading and thinking about *faith*, it is instructive to substitute the word *belief* and consider the meaning again. Belief is often a more tangible concept than faith. It is an "either/or" concept, not a "how much" concept. You can't half believe that Jesus is the Son of God! The blind man in Matthew 9 had faith (belief) in Jesus and so was healed. It was not that he had the required amount of faith.

We are particularly troubled in our understanding of faith by a repeated phrase of Jesus, "Oh you of little faith"

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **(Matt 6:29-30)**

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. **(Matt 8:26)**

"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? **(Matt 16:6-8)**

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" **(Mt 14:28-31)**

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." **(Mt 17:20)**

The last two incidents are particularly instructive. Peter walking on the water is one of the greatest feats of faith that any man has accomplished, yet Jesus accuses him of having little faith. How can this be?

The final incident is when the disciples failed to deliver a boy from a demon after the Mount of Transfiguration. The twelve had recently returned from their amazingly successful mission healing the sick and casting out demons and they were full of faith **(Mk 6:13)**. So again, how can Jesus accuse them of having little faith?

When asked by the boy's father they clearly had faith since they attempted to deliver the boy rather than wait for Jesus to return. However the boy continued to convulse and, faced with this "evidence" of failure, they were left unbelieving. Unbelieving disciples could do nothing but wait for Jesus. Jesus was exasperated at their failure, calling them (literally) "unbelieving and having been perverted". The disciple's initial and

well founded confidence in God's power working through them to deliver was *perverted* by the evidence of their eyes and ears.

Jesus was angry with them for letting a powerless demon pervert their faith; their confidence in the authority they had previously exercised had evaporated. These disciples were double-minded. One minute believing they had authority, the next denying it – and all because a measly and terrified demon put on a show! James learnt from this incident and warned that a double-minded person would not receive anything from the Lord (**Jas 1:7**).

When the disciples ask why they failed, Jesus said it was because of their "little faith"¹; but note that Jesus immediately says they only need faith "as a mustard seed".

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" He replied, "Because you have so little faith. "I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (**Mt 17:20**)

Jesus had previously used the mustard seed as an illustration of the Kingdom of God, saying it was the smallest seed (**Mk 4:31**). Jesus cannot be contradicting himself, first saying they need bigger faith, then saying they only need the smallest amount of faith!

The Greek word translated "little", *oligos* means puny (in extent, degree, number, duration or value – Strongs G3641). Short is a better translation, since it can be applied to all these aspects – "The road is short", "the flour is short", "the team is short", "the meeting was short", "I have been short-changed". *Little* does not have the same range of uses. So the Greek can just as well mean "short-lived faith" which aptly describes the disciple's in each incident above where Jesus uses this word. It also fits with James' warning mentioned above about being double-minded.

So Jesus tells His disciples that it is not the quantity of faith that counts, just the presence of faith. "Because you have such short-lived faith. I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (**Matt 17:20**). To think of faith as a quantity that we need much of is to completely disregard what Jesus said about the mustard seed. Peter had sufficient faith to get started, but when he saw the waves he let his faith evaporate. He had more than a mustard seed of faith, but it was short lived. Jesus said to Peter (literally), "You of short-lived faith, why were you double-minded?" (**Matt 14:31**).

Jesus warns us about short-lived faith and the remedy He gives is prayer and fasting; "this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." Remember that Jesus was exasperated by the disciple's failure, so they could have succeeded if their faith had not been short-lived. They did not need to go on a fasting and praying retreat to deal with this. They just needed to maintain their faith. But their faith was shaken by the boy having a fit. Instead of running away in shame at their failure, they should have stood their ground and prayed. If they had got their eyes back on God instead of staring at the fitting boy they would have known that no demon can resist God's authority. They would have laughed at the futile demonic display and cast it out with a word, just like Jesus did. Fasting no doubt helps with double-mindedness since it requires a settled determination to reject the fleshly cries of the body. This determination, contrary to our senses, is precisely what is required when confronting situations that do not yield immediately to prayer.

So the deciding issue is not how much faith we have but whether we have faith; or to be more specific, what are we believing about God and do we still believe it when our senses challenge that belief? Now consider the verse at the top of this section:

Jesus said to the blind men, "According to your faith you will be healed"; and their sight was restored (**Mt 9:27-30**).

¹ The two main families of Greek texts differ here. One says *unbelief*, the other *little belief*. Matthew frequently has Jesus reprimanding his disciples for having *little belief*, so I think it is a fair reading here as well. See Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8;

It was not that they had *enough* faith to be healed, but that they *had* faith.² They had faith for healing and that is what they received. Now consider what typically happens when we come to pray for healing for cancer. For some reason we think that cancer is difficult to heal, and requires much faith, and we must get everyone we know to pray as often as possible. Jesus say's "According to your faith you will be healed". If we think cancer is this difficult, if that is what we believe, if that is what our faith is, then we will certainly find it difficult. We reap what we sow. Healing is according to our faith.

We never find Jesus or the disciples rounding up intercessors to pray for difficult situations. There are no difficult situations! Jesus has already assured us that a mustard seed of faith is all that's required. So why do we deny His assurance and play to the devils lies and treat some problems as requiring extra-heavy-duty faith and prayer? This is being double-minded. It's what Jesus and James repeatedly warned us of. We may want to get the church together to try and deal with unbelief and double-mindedness, but let us not promote it!

Dealing with Discouragement

So, with all this massive biblical encouragement to pray and believe for divine healing, what do you do if your prayer does not appear to have been answered?

The first thing, as we have just seen, is to persist in prayer. We must not be double-minded, believing one minute and disbelieving the next. If we had given up after the first prayer we would not have seen sight restored and paralysis, arthritis and stroke victims healed. We must not allow doubt to poison us. Jesus told us to heal the sick and promised to hear and answer our prayers. We only need a mustard-seed of faith to heal. Either I believe Jesus was telling the truth or I don't. We can't half-believe! Don't let the Devil trick you into thinking you don't have enough faith. If you are praying for the sick then it is presumably because you have faith. Let that be the end of it. So follow your faith through with action. Pray confidently. Thank God. Proclaim the presence of the Kingdom and the defeat of Satan. Make your boast in the Lord. Confidently insist that you are doing God's will and that He has heard you and answered you. Then ask God what to do next and be obedient. Don't let your senses, demons or other people put you off from trusting and obeying God.

We must not downplay the role of divine healing

We might be tempted to spare ourselves and those we pray for from disappointment by downplaying the place of divine healing in the gospel. This would not be truly pastoral. We must not "hesitate to preach anything that would be helpful" (**Acts 20:20**) and we must be faithful to preach the Gospel Jesus committed to us (**Matt 9:35**). After we have persevered and persisted and we have given a week or so for healing to manifest, if there is still no evidence of healing, then we should not pretend that healing has come when it hasn't. We should either persist (preferably) or acknowledge that sometimes when we pray people are not healed. But let us remember and remind people that when Jesus prayed everyone was healed. We assume therefore, that as we get closer to Jesus, more people will be healed more quickly.

We must not blame the sufferer for lack of faith:

Paul suffered infirmity at the beginning of his stay with the Galatians (**Gal 4:13-14**) - very likely as the result of a stoning he received shortly before where he was left for dead! Epaphroditus nearly died from sickness (**Phil 2:25-27**), Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (**2Tim 4:20**) and Timothy suffered from frequent illness (it seems from dirty water):

² When Jesus was unable to do many miracles in Nazareth, the NIV unhelpfully translates Matt 13:58 as "lack of faith" whereas the Greek is *a-pistis* = unbelief. They did not suffer from small faith, but hostile unbelief. On the other hand, the "great faith" that the centurion had was not a measure of how strongly he believed, but of the extent of his belief. He believed in Jesus' authority to heal at a distance, not just when present. A mustard seed of faith is sufficient.

“Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses”
(1Tim 5:23)

In none of these circumstances is sickness attributed to unbelief. Even though Paul exhorts Timothy to set an example of faith (1 Tim 4:12) he does not point to his sickness as evidence of or the result of unbelief. Neither does Paul exhort Timothy to stand fast in claiming healing to show his faith.

Jesus rebuked the *disciples* for not being able to heal people, but he did not rebuke the sick people for not being healed, even when he might have had grounds to do so (Mt 17:14-21).

Although there is a clear requirement for a basic level of faith in the person receiving healing, the primary responsibility is on the person ministering healing. The church in Liberia we ministered with had often prayed for healing for people in the community and had seen occasional wonderful healings. When we came with confident faith we saw 7 out of 8 healed immediately. The difference was not the faith of those who were sick, but of those ministering.

We must be realistic and accept non-miraculous remedies

It is clear that Paul both experienced healing himself and ministered powerfully in healing to others, as did the other apostles. But it is also clear that Paul accepted that divine healing does not always come immediately and adopted a realistic approach to health, recommending to Timothy the homely remedy of drinking wine. God has provided a variety of means of healing. Miraculous healing is primarily associated in the scriptures with proclaiming the presence of the Kingdom of God. Clearly, healing must be maintained within the Kingdom for this proclamation to carry weight, but the miraculous element is not required to produce conviction. I am not suggesting that we cannot expect miraculous healing within the church – indeed there are many conditions that have no other remedy. But I do not think we should reject non-miraculous remedies. However I am firmly convinced that we must not accept sickness! Even though we may glorify God in bearing our sickness well, sickness is of the Devil and Jesus came to destroy his works. God is more glorified through healing than through submission to the evil of sickness.

We must accept that sometimes in God’s wisdom healing is withheld or delayed

There are mysteries around healing that no wise and mature saint has fathomed (the young have not yet learnt that God will not be put in a box). Although Paul got an explanation from God for his continuing “thorn in the flesh”³ the bible does not tell us why healing does not always come. Even that great man of faith Elisha who healed others, himself died from a sickness, though even his dead bones brought life to another (2 K 13:14-21). There are things God sees which we do not and although we know that God is always good and that sickness is ultimately of the devil, we can never forget that God allowed the apparent triumph of evil over Jesus on the cross in order to achieve the overthrow of evil and the establishment of His kingdom. God’s wisdom is above ours and though he promises to give us wisdom when we ask, His is ultimately unsearchable. This must not be used as a get-out clause. Jesus commands us to heal the sick with confident faith. That is where our focus should lie.

We must never give up

We must never go soft on the fact that Jesus both performed and taught healing as part of the proclamation of the gospel and that He intends us to do likewise. His promises were not meant to taunt us but to inspire us. The Devil wants us to give up praying and believing for healing, but Jesus wants us to be confident and persistent (Lk 18:1-8). We are to follow the example of those “who by faith and patience inherit the promises”. The possibility that God may not always heal is **never** presented in scripture as a reason for caution in praying for the sick. We are given many gospel promises for healing and simply told to get on with it. Therefore we take God at His word and pray

³ Which I do not think was a sickness, but was nevertheless a prayer of faith that received a negative answer.

with full expectation and confidence for divine healing. Only on instruction from God or the person being prayed for should we change tack.

God's will be done

Some people dislike adding "God's will be done" when they are trying to pray a "faith" prayer, feeling it is a get-out clause. I do not think we should view it this way. Jesus, our model of faith, Himself prayed "Father, not My will, but Yours be done" and He taught us to pray "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven...". Surely all our prayers are just a long-winded and often poorly informed way of saying "Your will be done". I think we do well to add "Your will be done" to all our prayers – not as a get-out clause, but as a strong, believing, faith-filled cry to God to do what He has promised and answer our prayers, grant our requests and demonstrate the powerful presence of the Kingdom of God in our midst. It is our battle-cry!

But how can we know God's will when prayers go unanswered? How can I pray for healing if I don't know for sure if it is God's will? Well, I think that is God's problem not mine. If He has given so much encouragement to pray for healing and no instruction on how to work out when in His higher wisdom He does not wish to heal, then I take it that he does not want me to concern myself with those rare instances. What do you want God to say to you when you give an account of your life? "You were a real pest with all your expectant prayers for healing" or "After the first three prayers, I never heard from you again." I know which side I want to err on. Our job is to keep praying and keep believing. It is God's job to answer or instruct otherwise.

Get up again

One of my favourite definitions of a righteous person is this, "He gets up again." It comes from this wonderful scripture:

"I will look to the LORD, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me. Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD will be a light to me." (**Micah 7:7-8**)

This scripture keeps me going. We will get discouraged and feel like giving up. But my eyes are on God, not the discouragement. He is my salvation. He hears me. He is my light. I will get up again and carry on praying and believing. If we want to *enjoy* all of God in the New Creation, then I think we must *believe* all of God in the present creation.