

## Thoughts on Ministry of Healing

### (16) Prayer for the Sick (pages 225-233)

#### Summary:

The main thesis of this chapter seems to be that God is just as willing to restore the sick to health now as He was in biblical times. His disciples today are to be as active in prayer for the sick as the disciples of old were.

#### Thoughts:

When those who attend the sick live in the presence of God, the sick come to the conviction that God is with them in a healing presence, and this conviction will do much to heal both soul and body. (226)

When it comes to praying for the sick it is important to consider the role of both repentance and obedience. Where sickness has been caused by disregard for nature's laws of health, miraculous healing might only confirm someone in their destructive indulgences. So in praying for the sick it is important to encourage repentance and a willingness to do that which fosters health in the future. We should not expect from God a miracle that will encourage sin. (227)

People need to be encouraged to trust in God. To be anxious about oneself tends to weakness and disease. In an atmosphere of trust and peace there is healing power. While we should pray according to God's will, we need to trust that God's will is the best thing for us. When we trust in God we can be at peace about the outcome. God knows the end from the beginning, including the outcome that would occur if healing should take place. So if people are not healed when we pray for healing, we should not conclude that they or we did not have faith. (229-230)

There is a fine line between encouraging the exercise of faith in prayer regardless of former indiscretions and emphasizing the obligation to change of life and habits, which could be discouraging to some.

While Ellen White encourages prayer for the sick, we need to be honest that scientific attempts to test the power of prayer have offered mixed results. See *The American Heart Journal* 151:4 (April 2006): 934-942, which found no benefit to intercessory prayer, and *The Southern Medical Journal* 81:7 (July 1988): 826-829 or *Archives of Internal Medicine* 163:12 (June 2003): 1405-1408, which did. Ellen White herself seems to begin this chapter with a strong statement on the power of prayer (226) and then move to a more rational approach to disease by the end of the chapter (231-233). This chapter flow seems to mirror the flow of her life as well. Her earliest ministry was strong on miracles and she was reluctant to go to doctors. Later she was much, more positive about health practices and scientific health care. Her great health vision of 1863, of course, must have played a major role in that shift.

One point that is crucial about all these studies. The overwhelming majority of people in our day who pray don't get miraculous healings. It happens at times but it is not the norm. And it was not the norm during most eras described in the Bible. Biblical miracles are largely clustered around the Exodus, the time of Elijah and Elisha, and the time of Jesus and His disciples. The statement in 1 *Testimonies* 561 is instructive: "Let no one obtain the idea that the Institute is the place for them to come to be raised up by the prayer of faith. That is the place to find relief from

disease by treatment and right habits of living, and to learn how to avoid sickness. But if there is one place under the heavens more than another where soothing, sympathizing prayer should be offered by men and women of devotion and faith it is at such an institute. Those who treat the sick should move forward in their important work with strong reliance upon God for His blessing to attend the means which He has graciously provided, and to which He has in mercy called our attention as a people, such as pure air, cleanliness, healthful diet, proper periods of labor and repose, and the use of water.”

A colleague suggested a pattern in prayer that is helpful. Prayer begins with frank expressions to God of the desire of our hearts (healing, etc.), but the same prayer can and should end with “Thy will be done.” The latter is not truly expressed until the former has been expressed.

### **Quotable Quotes:**

“When human strength fails, men feel their need of divine help. And never does our merciful God turn from the soul that in sincerity seeks Him for help.” (225)

“God is just as willing to restore the sick to health now as when the Holy Spirit spoke these words through the psalmist. And Christ is the same compassionate physician now that He was during His earthly ministry. In Him there is healing balm for every disease, restoring power for every infirmity. His disciples in this time are to pray for the sick as verily as the disciples of old prayed. And recoveries will follow; for ‘the prayer of faith shall save the sick.’” (226)

“Many persons bring disease upon themselves by their self-indulgence. They have not lived in accordance with natural law or the principles of strict purity. Others have disregarded the laws of health in their habits of eating and drinking, dressing, or working. Often some form of vice is the cause of feebleness of mind or body. Should these persons gain the blessing of health, many of them would continue to pursue the same course of heedless transgression of God’s natural and spiritual laws, reasoning that if God heals them in answer to prayer, they are at liberty to continue their unhealthful practices and to indulge perverted appetite without restraint. If God were to work a miracle in restoring these persons to health, He would be encouraging sin.” (227)

“If any who are seeking health have been guilty of evilspeaking, if they have sowed discord in the home, the neighborhood, or the church, and have stirred up alienation and dissension, if by any wrong practice they have led others into sin, these things should be confessed before God and before those who have been offended.” (229)

“When wrongs have been righted, we may present the needs of the sick to the Lord in calm faith, as His Spirit may indicate. He knows each individual by name, and cares for each as if there were not another upon the earth for whom He gave His beloved Son. Because God’s love is so great and so unfailing, the sick should be encouraged to trust in Him and be cheerful. To be anxious about themselves tends to cause weakness and disease.” (229)

“God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. He will do more and better for us than to accomplish all our wishes. And because we can trust His wisdom and love, we should not ask Him to concede to our will, but should seek to enter into and accomplish His purpose.” (231)

“Those who seek healing by prayer should not neglect to make use of the remedial agencies within their reach. It is not a denial of faith to use such remedies as God has provided to alleviate pain and to aid nature in her work of restoration.” (231-232)

“When we have prayed for the recovery of the sick, whatever the outcome of the case, let us not lose faith in God. If we are called upon to meet bereavement, let us accept the bitter cup, remembering that a Father’s hand holds it to our lips. But should health be restored, it should not be forgotten that the recipient of healing mercy is placed under renewed obligation to the Creator.” (233)

**Tweets of Healing:**

Never does our merciful God turn from the soul that in sincerity seeks Him for help. (225)

God is as willing now to restore the sick as He was in biblical times. (226)

We should pray to God as One whose purpose is to heal and not destroy. (226)

We should not expect God to heal us if we are not willing to lay aside unhealthy practices. (227)

God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. (231)

Those who seek healing by prayer should not neglect to make use of the remedial agencies within their reach. (231)

We can ask God to give us the prayer He would like us to pray for the sick.

In an atmosphere of trust and peace there is healing power.