

Guidelines for Building the Ministry of Healing Prayer

The most important principle in building a prayer ministry in your church:

Never be deceived into thinking that God will give you apart from prayer what he has promised to give you only through prayer.

Simply put: we must never think that prayer is optional, that God will accomplish his purposes in your church regardless of whether or not you and your people faithfully and fervently pray. People will rarely devote themselves to a prayer ministry until such time as they realize that God has suspended his purposes for us on our prayers to him. Why, then, must we pray?

(1) We must pray because ***otherwise God will not be glorified.*** “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son” (John 14:13).

(2) We must pray because ***otherwise you and I will not experience the fullness of joy that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to give us.*** “Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

(3) We must pray because ***otherwise we will go without.*** “You do not have, because you do not ask” (James 4:2b).

(4) We must pray because ***otherwise the gospel will not succeed.*** “Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored” (2 Thess. 3:1). “At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ” (Col. 4:3a).

(5) We must pray because ***otherwise when we do attempt to preach the gospel, we are more likely to bring confusion to people rather than clarity.*** “At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison – *that I may make it clear*, which is how I ought to speak” (Col. 4:3-4).

(6) We must pray because ***otherwise we will remain enslaved to fear and cowardice and fail to preach the gospel at all.*** “[Pray also] for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak” (Eph. 6:19-20).

(7) We must pray because ***otherwise the lost will not be converted to Christ.*** “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved” (Romans 10:1).

(8) We must pray because ***otherwise the church will experience hardship and face obstacles that hinder the fulfillment of our calling as God’s people.*** “I urge that supplications, prayer, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Timothy 2:1-2).

(9) We must pray because ***otherwise the sick will not be healed.*** “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray” (James 5:13a). “Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14). And again, “confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (James 5:16).

(10) We must pray because ***otherwise the demonized and oppressed will not be set free.*** [Pray] “at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints” (Ephesians 6:18). “this kind (of demon) cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:29).

Your aim in building a prayer ministry is two-fold:

(1) To increase the level of **expectancy** when you pray for people without falling into the sin of **presumption**.

(2) To “**de-mystify**” healing prayer: (a) to help people recognize that praying for the sick, wounded, and oppressed isn’t the special prerogative of the ordained clergy or the uniquely gifted, and (b) to help people embrace their responsibility as a believer to incorporate healing prayer as a regular, normal, aspect of what it is to be a Christian.

Three additional comments by way of introduction, each of which has two points:

First, there are two extremes to avoid:

- (1) “functional deism”
- (2) “magic” and “manipulation”

Second, we must approach this topic by giving full weight to two truths about God himself:

- (1) his **goodness** (Luke 11:11-13)
- (2) his **sovereignty** (2 Cor. 12:7-10; James 5:13-18).

Third, we must make room in our theological framework for

- (1) a **redemptive** purpose in suffering (Ps. 119:67)
- (2) the element of **mystery** in God’s dealings with us that we will never be able to fully understand this side of heaven and the complete redemption of our bodies.

Principles of Healing Prayer

(1) The Role of Faith

Converting faith -

Continuing faith -

Charismatic faith - Consider these possible examples of the gift of faith:

"And Jesus answered saying to them, 'Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore, I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you" (Mark 11:22-24; cf. Matt. 17:20-21; 21:21-22).

"And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).

"And the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him" (James 5:15).

(2) The Relationship between Faith and Healing

Faith for healing can operate at any one of five levels.

- There is, first of all, *faith that God is your sole source for blessing*, that he is your hope and he alone (see Pss. 33:18-22; 147:10-11).
- There is, secondly, *faith in God's ability to heal* (Mt. 8:2; 9:28-29).
- A third level of faith is *faith in God's heart for healing*. This is *faith in God's goodness and his desire to bless his children* (see Ps. 103; Luke 11:11-13).
- Fourth, there is *the faith not simply that God can heal, not simply that God delights to heal, but faith that God does heal*. This is the *faith that healing is part of God's purpose and plan for his people today*.
- Fifth and finally, there is *the faith that it is his will to heal right now* (1 Cor. 12:9; James 5:15).

(3) Helpful Observations from James 5

First, James speaks about the relationship of *sickness to sin* in v. 15.

Second, the sin James has in mind may be that of bitterness, resentment, jealousy, anger, or unforgiveness in our relationships with one another, or conceivably any number of sins we may have committed against God. Hence, James advises us to "confess our sins to one another" (v. 16).

Third, we should take careful note of *the example of Elijah* (vv. 17-18).

Fourth, is there such a thing as "the gift of healing," and if so, what if I don't have it?

(4) The Laying on of Hands

a. In the ministry of Jesus - Matthew 8:15; 9:18-25,27-31; 14:36; 17:7; 19:13-15; Mark 1:40-42; 5:21-24; 6:1-6; 6:56; 7:31-35; 8:22-25; 9:27; 16:18; Luke 4:40; 13:10-13; 22:51; 24:50.

b. In the ministry of the early church - Acts 3:7; 5:12; 6:6; 8:17-19; 9:10-17,41; 11:30; 13:1-3; 14:3; 19:11; 28:7-8. This emphasis is also found in 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:22; 2 Tim. 1:6 (cf. Deut. 34:9; Num. 27:15-23.)

The Practice of Healing Prayer

(1) The Interview

a. Ask the person: Where does it hurt? How can I help? Is it physical, emotional, spiritual oppression or attack, etc.? Encourage them to be as specific and detailed as possible.

b. Ask the Holy Spirit: give time to listen (don't rush); be careful how you use whatever prompting or insights you believe the Spirit has given.

(2) The Diagnosis

The focus is to determine what is the **cause or source** of the condition. The causes could be any of the following or a combination of several:

- a. living in a fallen world / virus, accidents, etc.
- b. sin (cf. James 5 and John 9); be careful, don't compound their problem with accusations that might put unwarranted guilt on their hearts.
- c. emotional: anxiety, unforgiveness, stress, etc.
- d. family history (genetic, upbringing, etc.)
- e. demonic (cf. Luke 13)
- f. unknown
- g. be careful about drawing direct cause/effect conclusions (don't try to be smarter than the Holy Spirit!)

(3) The Prayer

a. Prayer directed **toward** God: petition for the Spirit's presence; focus on the specific problem (identify the physical problem or spiritual wound and intercede for God to touch it directly)

b. Prayer **from** God: command of faith ("be healed," "receive your healing," etc. based on faith); command to demons (deliverance; "be gone in the name of Jesus" etc.).

c. Avoid authoritative statements unless you have explicit biblical warrant.

d. Avoid thinking that God will not heal unless you say it “just right” or with “perfect grammar” or in a “theologically sophisticated” way. God is primarily concerned with the attitude of your heart and your compassion for the hurting and your dependence on him, not the “style” or “sophistication” with which you pray.

(4) The Practice

- a. If possible, ask them to close their eyes but keep yours open.
- b. Don't rush: spend time with the person; be patient (especially when praying for the sick)
- c. If you sense or see God doing something, bless it!
- d. Be aware of possible (but not necessary) physical manifestations (tingling, spasms, tears, warmth, shaking, deep breathing, etc.).
- e. Ask questions: How do you feel? Do you sense God is doing something? Are you feeling faith or doubt or fear? Depending on their answer, adjust your prayers appropriately. Don't be frustrated if they aren't feeling anything.
- f. Be sensitive about the laying on of hands: (a) if a man is praying for a woman, or vice versa (it is always good if more than one is present if this is the case), never touch them between the knees and the neck! Exception: back problems. (b) ask them first before you lay hands on them (“Is it ok with you?”). (c) consider anointing them with oil (ask first).
- g. When women begin to weep, their defenses are down, and they are especially vulnerable. Resist the instinctive reaction to hold or hug them. Find a woman to assist you.

(5) The Post-Prayer Directions

- a. Healing is often a process; if nothing has happened, encourage them to persevere in prayer (never stop praying unless shown otherwise by divine revelation or death! Cf. 2 Cor. 12 and Paul's thorn in the flesh).
- b. Never suggest the problem is their lack of faith. It *may* be (among other factors), but that is not for you to say.
- c. Let them talk about how they feel: are they encouraged, discouraged, filled with doubt or faith, etc. Do they feel the love of God or a sense of condemnation and failure? Their answer may open up a new avenue of prayer for them.
- d. Direct them to follow through on any necessary confession of sin or reconciliation with someone else.
- e. Encourage them to come again and seek prayer from you (or others) as often as they wish.
- f. Regardless of what happens, you have not failed! The degree of healing or relief is not the measure of success: obedience is.
- g. Avoid using the prayer time as an occasion for counseling.

Basic Guidelines

- Preach on prayer
- Provide opportunities for training (initially, at least quarterly)
- Encourage prayer ministry in small groups before moving to a corporate expression of it
- Identify those who are spiritually mature and knowledgeable about the principles given above
- Make room in your corporate gathering for prayer ministry (at minimum, at the close of the service)
- Be willing to follow the Spirit's leading for spontaneous prayer led from the platform
- Be patient: at first, people will be hesitant until they see your unflinching commitment to prayer and come to realize its absolute necessity
- Share testimonies about the power of prayer
- If you are a two-service church / provide intercessory prayer during the first service
- If you are a one-service church / provide intercessory prayer before the service (15 minutes)
- Persevere!