

Empowered by the Spirit to heal

- How many of you, right now are battling an injury or an illness?
- How many of you love somebody, know somebody who's battling an injury or an illness?

I am not sure if it is comforting, or a worry, that we are all in the same boat, in the same situation. That there's somebody you know and love, and you just wish they were OK. Unfortunately this is the world that we live in. If we read our bible, since sin entered the world, people are suffering, and they're sick, and they're struggling.

The first healing recorded by Jesus' people after Pentecost

Today we are going to look at Acts 3:1–10, the first healing that Luke records in the book of Acts after Pentecost.

I believe that God heals. Not always in the way that we hope, but he does heal. The other day I came across a story of a man who was healed, but not the way he had hoped. Back in 2011.

LAGOS, Nigeria — A modern Lazarus miracle caused city-wide revival in this nation's capital city, but the man at the centre of it is anything but happy.

"I'd like 15 minutes in a room with brass knuckles and that idiot Narobi," said David LaPonte, 43, the revived man. "I don't give a [care] about my witness."

Evangelist Nguno Narobi prayed over LaPonte's casket during a crusade meeting in mid-June. LaPonte had died from severe dysentery. Narobi thought LaPonte would rejoice at being revived, but he sat up and looked around and seemed crestfallen. His first words were, "What the ...? I'm back?" The crowd of thousands cheered and praised God, but LaPonte hopped out of the casket and demanded to know who'd raised him from the dead. Others pointed at Narobi, and the revived man began chasing him around, cursing and shouting threats until he was restrained.

He recounted how he'd been in a tunnel of light with relatives and angels all around him. At the end of the tunnel was Jesus, but before LaPonte

reached him, he felt himself sucked back through the tunnel and into his body. He came to consciousness in the casket in a dirty tent meeting in Lagos.

LaPonte was taken home and pronounced healthy and well. Doctors revoked his death certificate. But three weeks later, he's still furious, despite the revival that resulted from the miracle. He says he's considered suicide. He cries "all night and all day," he says.

Narobi has tried to make amends and invited LaPonte to take part in crusades so that "many more will be saved." LaPonte refuses. He vows that if he ever encounters Narobi on a dark street he'll "beat him very badly."

Anyway let's get back to Luke and the first healing in Acts. Act 3:1-10

3 Peter and John went to the Temple one afternoon to take part in the three o'clock prayer service. ²As they approached the Temple, a man lame from birth was being carried in. Each day he was put beside the Temple gate, the one called the Beautiful Gate, so he could beg from the people going into the Temple. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for some money.

⁴Peter and John looked at him intently, and Peter said, "Look at us!"⁵The lame man looked at them eagerly, expecting some money. ⁶But Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!"

⁷Then Peter took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed and strengthened. ⁸He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

⁹All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God. ¹⁰When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate, they were absolutely astounded!

Healed for God's glory

As we read through Acts it seems that the disciples were empowered to heal. Yes we read that they also healed people before Pentecost, but is this a special aspect of the arrival of the Holy Spirit? So, what I want to do today is I want to look at this particular healing, and then we will look at the broad category of healing.

So, let's start with this bloke recorded on Acts 3. Here's what we know about him. He was lame from birth. That is all we are told, but we can read a bit more into that.

He was born with a condition where he was unable to live a normal life. This is a man who had never stood up on his own two feet. He'd never gone for a walk. This is a man who while growing up would watch the other kids walk around and play, but he couldn't.

What this probably means is he's never going to marry because he has no income. He was no way of providing for his family. And so he is subjected to a life of poverty. They didn't have a disability benefit or anything like that, and so he would rely on the generosity of people. He would sit outside of the temple, I guessing his family or friends would have to carry him there day after day, after day, after day. He's completely at the mercy of others.

Along come Peter and John, and he goes through his normal routine. In our time in Bangladesh we were confronted with beggars on a daily basis, and let me assure each has their own finely tuned routine that they go through hoping to get a response from the many passer-by's.

What his routine was we don't know but somehow he communicated to them he needs money. And they say, "Silver and gold have I none." says that old song! So, these guys are not prosperity preachers?

So, they look at the man. They say, "Look at me," so he looks at them. He says, "Look, I've got no money for you, but how about healing? That we can do, by God's grace. So, stand up, walk, be well." And God heals the man – immediately.

In the name of Jesus - to the glory of God

The first thing to note about this story is it's all **in the name of Jesus**. "In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk". Now, the name of Jesus is not like a magic mantra, but it's inviting the living Jesus into that moment. They are saying "Jesus is still alive and well." You could talk to him when he was on the earth; you can still talk to him. You could go to him when he was on the earth; you can still go to him. "In the name of Jesus get up and walk."

This is so we see that, ultimately, who is it that healed this man? Not Peter and not John - It was Jesus. **And then the result is that God is worshiped**. This man goes into the temple—and this would have been the first time in his life that

he was able to go into the temple. There was a restriction on those with any physical disability that they were not allowed into the temple. But he's now able to go into the temple, so as soon as he is healed he goes into the temple that he might worship, and praise and celebrate the goodness of God, and the other people are astounded and they do the same.

The ultimate goal is not healing; it's the secondary goal. This is important when trying to understand the bible for today that we look at what the big picture is, what the overall message God is trying to communicate to the people, to us. Often when we pray for healing, we so often see that as the goal, healing now, for me, so that I can enjoy life, or whatever. However the primary goal is the glory of God.

Some reasons for why there's sickness and suffering

I don't know about you but I would love to bump into some random who hasn't walked all their life, and tell them to rise up and walk... and see them do it!! Great story, but for me it raises a whole lot more questions.

The first question might be, "Well, does God still do that? "And if he does, why are certain people healed and other people not?" How does this all work?

And then a deeper question still - why is there sickness and Suffering?

Pragmatically I could answer that "Well, you know, sickness and death, it's just part of life." However there are some theological answers as well. Which I wouldn't encourage you to mention when you are sitting with someone who is suffering. Let quickly look at some of those theological answers.

1. Sin and the fall

This is Genesis 1-3 stuff that in the beginning everything was very good. Everything was alive. There was no death. But then in rebellion against God, we chose to turn our back on God, and as a result, we chose death over life. The result is now that sin has infected and affected everyone and everything.

So you can theologically answer that bad stuff and sickness happens simply because we live in a broken world.

A few months ago I was asked to visit someone who has terminal cancer, they're not much of a church goer but had some questions about life and death and faith and God, and I was more than happy to go and have a chat. After a bit of getting to know each another I said, now you have some

questions, I am happy to try and help as long as you don't ask how prayer and healing works because I don't know. To which he replied, well that deals with those questions efficiently.

Now for all those of you who unlike me are lovely, sensitive people and are horrified at my response, we did talk around the issue for some time, but the fact is we don't know all the reasons why sickness happens and how prayer and healing works apart from sin entered the world and everything is infected and affected, and nothing is the way God intended, and nothing is the way that it should be.

When the Bible says, "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" we're not supposed to raise our hand and say, "I do." It's a rhetorical question. So, I'm not going to pretend to know and explain how it all works.

Here's what I can tell you right now: God does not sit there thinking, who will I inflict cancer on today, or who will I involve in a serious accident. Sin has infected and affected everything, and nothing is the way that it was supposed to be."

2. Personal sin

The second cause for sickness is personal sin, and this can get even trickier to explain. 1 Corinthians 11:30, *"This is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."*

Now in life there is often a direct cause and effect? You're drinking and driving, you get in a wreck, and you injure yourself or worse, someone else. You say, "Well, there's cause and effect." Personal sin can lead to personal suffering. An example a little bit more subtle - You eat very poorly, and you get diabetes, or you become obese. Or you drink too much and you damage your liver. These cause and effects are still pretty easy to see and connect. But sometimes there is a spiritual cause and effect.

The situation in Corinth was this: These people are getting drunk, they're having lots of sex, and they're rebelling against God. They claim to be believers, but they're living open, defiant, rebellious lives, and they're coming to the Communion Table, they are claiming to be righteous. They're not repenting of their sin; they're not acknowledging their sin. Their theology was "You died for my sin, so I get to sin all that I want. I can sin that grace may abound."

Wrong, there are spiritual consequence to our actions.

3. Evil spiritual stuff

Third category for sickness is spiritual, or evil forces, or demonic spirits and there is a wide variety of opinions of how this works, and I don't really want to try and tackle this complex issue here but we hear of this many times in the Bible. Again I don't know how all of this works but I believe in the supernatural, I believe in a good God and if a good God can exist, so can bad, evil forces, and that is not even taking into account the fact that Jesus talked about them.

A couple of things to mention. First John tells us not to accept or believe every spirit but to test the spirits because not all the spirits are from the Lord. "They brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word." We're not talking about some crazy exorcism, holy water, and a cross. It's just the authority of Jesus and the truth of the Bible. Which says "And he healed all who were sick."

Those are the three primary categories for why people become sick.

Why does God heal?

To conclude I want to quickly look at the question of **Why does God heal?** We can take all of these from Acts 3 in our case study.

1. It's an act of God's love and mercy

You look at this lame guy in the story, picture him in your mind. For God to love and heal him, what a great act of mercy. For the rest of his life, this man is a trophy of God's grace. As he walks around, everybody's like, "Hey, do you know who that is? "God really loved that guy, and had mercy on him "and healed him. Look at that. Isn't that amazing? Look at what God did."

Healing a sign of love, it's a sign of mercy, it's a sign of affection, it's a sign of compassion for the afflicted person. God does love people.

2. It reveals the kingdom of God

Here's something to remember: God will eventually heal everyone in the kingdom. The kingdom of God is not yet fully revealed, but it has breakthroughs. It has occurrences where the kingdom of God intersects with the kingdoms of humanity, and the kingdom of God makes these cameo appearances and shows up and gives us a taste of what's to come, and it causes our hearts to yearn and long for his perfect kingdom.

3. It witnesses to non-Christians

If someone is suffering and God heals them, it tends to grab people's attention, although to be honest I think our western culture is even quite resistant to that. But in many other cultures this really gets people attention.

Non-Christians are curious about Jesus when they're seeing him at work in someone's life in a powerful way.

4. It motivates Christians to worship

I talked a bit about this earlier - when this man was healed, he praised God, and he went into the temple, and others were filled with amazement, and they're all praising God. It increases the worship of God's people.

So one final question

As I said before understanding healing is complicated, in fact I don't believe we can box it up nicely, just as you can't confine God in a box. I'm sure talking about healing will lead to more questions like **can everyone receive healing in this life?**

How many of you have come across a teaching that says, "Everyone can be healed, and you need to have faith, and if you have enough faith, you can be healed, which means if you're not healed, it's because you don't have enough faith"? Can I suggest to you that that is horrific. It's the way that a person says, "If it doesn't work, it's your fault, not mine."

As I said before I believe that God heals and sometimes he chooses to heal miraculously, other time not. I want you to ask for healing, and it only takes the faith the size of a mustard seed, but I want you to know that not every one of you will be healed.

I don't know who will be healed and who won't, so I'm going to pray for everyone who asks, and some who don't ask, and see what happens.

Why doesn't healing happen every time? I don't know! Sometimes God won't heal us for our own good. Sometimes God won't heal us because he loves us. Sometimes God won't heal us because even though it might be good for our body, it may not be good for our soul, and that's what Paul says. He says, "You know, if everything was great and I was always fine, I might just become a really arrogant guy, and this really keeps me humble and dependent on the Lord and his grace." So no, not everybody will be healed in this life.

Communion and prayer

We are now going to move into communion and worship and prayer

- If you came today with someone who is sick, suffering illness or injury, before they leave this place, would you please pray with them?
- during communion and after the service we're going to have people available to pray for those who want to have prayer for healing. They will pray for you and do exactly what the Bible tells us to do.
- Maybe this week in your small group, if any of you are suffering or you love someone who is, your Group could spend this week praying, praying for each other. I know many of you already do that.
- Pause, knee, pray at the foot of the Cross

PRAYER

Father God, I pray for us right now. Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are willing to heal us spiritually, that you are willing to forgive our sin. Lord Jesus, I thank you for sending the Holy Spirit to dwell in all of us.

Lord God, I thank you that you are the Great Physician, that you can and do heal. Lord God, I thank you that you'll heal some in this life. I thank you that you have healed some in this church. I thank you that you will heal some this week. I pray you will heal some on this day.

Lord God, I pray that we would be a church that, in faith and in prayer and in humility by the grace of God, has compassion on those who are sick and suffering.

And Lord God, I pray for us as a people this week, that we would love and encourage and pray for, and serve one another. in Jesus name we pray and say thank you, amen.