

Well...it's **Father's Day** today...did anyone get breakfast in bed? Did anyone get a tie? Sweater vest? Rogaine? I took my dad to the Whitecaps game last night, and we yelled ourselves hoarse as the Caps took down the New England Revolution...a big thanks to Martin Rennie and the lads for making the night special for me and my dad.

I've been thinking a lot about fatherhood in the last few days--thinking about my father, about my own fathering, and about what it means for men to be spiritual fathers.

Jesus told a great story in Luke 15 that has come to be known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son, but it could just as easily be called the Parable of the Loving Father. Many of you know the story: a father had two sons, one who was dutiful and another who liked to party. The one who liked to party asked for an early inheritance and took off to the far country where he squandered everything he had been given on wild living.

When he had lost everything, the money, his friends, and his self-respect, he came home to grovel and found that his father had been waiting for him, with arms open wide. The father forgave him and restored him to a place of honour--but the father had no guarantee that this son wouldn't do it again.

When the dutiful son heard that his wild-living-brother had come home, that his father had welcomed him back and thrown a subsequent party for him--the dutiful son burned with anger and refused to go inside the house. And, so, once more the father went out to embrace a son.

Henri Nouwen says that whether we are the wild son, or the embittered, dutiful son, God's plan is for all sons to become like the Father--to watch for those both far and near that are in need of embrace. Men, you don't need to have a child in order to be like the Father.

Just yesterday my dad told me a great story about Ted. Ted is in his early 80's; he's someone my dad used to work with more than twenty years ago. Not too long ago, Ted called up my dad and asked if he would take him fishing. My dad is a master fisherman--he can be on a river with 30 guys and be the only person catching fish.

When Ted showed up, he had fishing pole that resembled a 2x4, and spinning reel that looked like a salad spinner; unfortunately Ted's body was in even worse shape than his fishing gear. He told my dad that his legs were so bad that he couldn't feel his feet anymore. So my dad took him by the arm and walked him along the path to the river.

When they got to the river bank, it was so steep that Ted would have never made it on his own. So my dad said, "*Ted, why don't you take my hand and I'll help you into the river, and then you and I are going to catch some fish.*" And that's exactly what happened--my dad and Ted waded into the river and before long they began to haul in fish. Ted told my dad it was one of the best days he'd ever had.

Men sometimes we walk throughout life wearing horse blinders--we lock our eyes on our careers, the big game, friends, family, and we fail to see who and what is all around us. My dad wrapped up his Ted story saying, "*when I'm in my 80's, I wonder will anyone hold my hand and lead me down the bank into the river?*"

Men, people like Ted live all around us--they're hoping that someone will notice them, bless them, invite them into relationship; they need someone who has the heart to live like the Father. The Father's plan is for his sons to become fathers too--that we might represent Him in the world.

On this Father's Day, let me encourage you to receive the embrace of God the Father. Whether you are the wild son in a far off country, or the dutiful son who feels like he deserves better, the Father waits to embrace you right where you are. And I pray that His Fathering will make all the difference in your fathering.

Pray

Because of our church-wide BBQ last week, it's been two weeks since I last preached about healing. As we continue in our healing series, I want to take a few minutes to summarize where we've been so that we can press forward this morning.

The Bible has good news for those who find themselves longing for wholeness but living with relational, emotional, and physical brokenness. The good news is that even now, Jesus is working to heal and restore us to wholeness.¹

Two Sundays ago, I told you that there were two things I wanted you to know:

¹ Darrell Johnson, *Good News For Humpty Dumpty*, Regent Pastors' Conference, 2003.

² Hebrews 1:1-3; Colossians 1:15.

(a) First, I want everyone to know that Jesus' earthly ministry reveals God's will when it comes to healing and restoration. Jesus is the exact representation of God's being, He is the invisible God made visible²--all we need to know about God's character and action is found in Jesus.

As the kingdom of God breaks into our world, we can expect to see restoration, we can expect to see glimpses of wholeness--this is what happened in Jesus' ministry and it's still happening today.

(b) Second, I want everyone to know that Jesus did not *have* a healing ministry, He *has* a healing ministry--Jesus has invited us to join Him in His work.

Two Sundays ago, I also told you that there were two things I want you to experience:

(a) First, this side of heaven, I want you to experience whatever measure of healing that Jesus' has in store for you. Whatever the nature of our brokenness, be it relational, physical, emotional, sexual--we can bring it to Jesus and ask Him to release healing and restoration in our lives.

(b) Second, I want you to join in Jesus' ministry of healing--praying for the healing and restoration of the people you come into contact with.

Over the next two weeks I want to address one of the most significant questions people ask when it comes to the ministry of healing, namely, *if God loves the world, and healing demonstrates the reality of His leadership in our world, then why don't we see more of it?*

This morning I'm going to tackle some of the practical hindrances that can stand in the way of healing, most of which can be traced to wrong thinking and practice. But before I launch this message, I want to prepare you to listen well this morning.

I recognize that when I talk about what the Bible has to say about healing, I am treading on sacred ground. Healing is not an impersonal subject; many of us are deeply invested in the subject of healing because you, or someone you love, has (or had) a healing need. Perhaps you've prayed for healing and received it, and so, you have strong ideas about the subject. Or perhaps you've prayed for healing and have not received it, and so, you have strong ideas about the subject.

This morning, a number of you may be challenged to rethink what you think about healing; you may be holding on to something that I will describe as "wrong" thinking or practice.

Can I ask you to do something for me this morning? I want to ask you to listen prayerfully, asking the Spirit to speak and to guide. I also want to ask you to write down any questions you may have and send them to me via email. As a form of communication, preaching has one major limitation--a lack of dialogue. As we continue through this series, we want to address the questions you are asking.

So what are some of the hindrances that stand in the way of healing?
Let's begin with the first hindrance:

Hindrance 1: A Secular Worldview

A worldview is like a set of lenses that we wear; our worldview helps us to interpret the reality that we see and experience. It bears mentioning that there is no single worldview that has been universally accepted--you and I might see the world in very different terms.

A secular worldview describes the world as a closed system, governed exclusively by the cause and effect of natural laws. If you have grown up in the West, then you have been saturated in a secular worldview--even if you have only embraced it in part, it can be a hindrance to praying for healing.

There is no room for God in a secular worldview. Now, those of us who follow Jesus have clearly rejected this portion of the worldview, but I wonder if we haven't been affected by some secular subtleties? As I mentioned before, there is no room for God in a secular worldview, there is no outside interference, and certainly no divine intervention in our world.

I've met Bible-believing Christians that are practical secularists--that is, they believe that God exists, but practically speaking, they speak of God as though He were absent, disinterested, and uninvolved in our world. If this is our view of God, there will be little reason to pray for healing--we won't expect God to hear, let alone, answer our prayers.

The Bible teaches just the opposite--God is present, interested, and deeply involved in His world. Every time we pray, we proclaim that God is loving, strong, and engaged; every time we pray, we are asking for God to intervene in our present situation. Unless we believe that God is loving and strong, our lives will be prayerless. When we do not pray for God's miraculous intervention, we rarely see His activity, but when we do pray with expectancy, we often see Him at work.

For too long the church has subscribed to an either/or paradigm when it comes to healing; from my perspective, healing prayer and medical science are not in competition with one another. To quote Ruth Anne Fraser, "God brings his healing grace through many means: medicine, herbs, surgery, nutrition, etc." Ken Blue writes, "The real tension is not between [faith] and science but between a secular worldview and a view of reality that allows for the activity of the living God."³

The second hindrance I want to highlight today I've labelled:

Hindrance 2: Sanctification Through Sickness

One of the greatest hindrances to praying for healing is the idea that God regularly, intentionally, sends sickness a "gift" in order to secure our dependence, to purify our faith, and to build our character. If we value sickness as God's means of making us holy, there will be little

impetus to pray for healing. The reason this kind of thinking is so hard to stamp out is because many of us have an uncle, a friend, a spouse who "grew closer to God" while they were sick. I'll come back to this idea a little later on.

I want you to reason with me for a moment. Listen as I read a quote from Francis MacNutt: "When we say that God sends sickness or asks us to endure it, we are creating for many people an image of God they must eventually reject. What human father or mother would choose cancer for their daughter to tame her pride?...Those preachers and chaplains who try to comfort the sick by telling them to accept their illness as a blessing sent from God are giving an immediate consolation but at what an ultimate cost!"⁴ Ken Blue writes, "What we would call child abuse in a human family, some have labeled a blessing in the family of God."⁵

What's interesting is that those who have adopted this mindset--that sickness is sent by God to grow our dependence, faith, and character--typically have no problem seeking medical treatment to alleviate or eliminate their condition. We rarely question whether it is "God's will" to visit our doctor; we presume that it is wise and good to do so and that the help they offer us should be effective. Why then do we hold back in asking God to bring healing to our bodies?

You may be saying to yourself, "*Hold on a second Mark...doesn't the Bible affirm that God uses suffering to grow our dependence, faith,*

³ Ken Blue, *Authority To Heal*, 59.

⁴ Francis MacNutt, *The Power To Heal*, 139-140.

⁵ Blue, 21.

and character? Aren't we supposed to 'give thanks in all circumstances,' and 'to consider it pure joy' when we face trials of many kinds?

In our own English language, the word “*suffering*” covers a lot of ground; we use it to convey the idea of difficulty, hardship, persecution, sickness, heartache, etc. But it’s important to underscore that the language of the New Testament--ancient Greek--uses the word “*suffering*” much more narrowly. In the New Testament, “*suffering*” refers almost exclusively to the difficulty, pain, or persecution one faces because they have chosen to follow Jesus. Throughout the New Testament, this kind of *suffering* is commended, but *sickness* is never talked about in this regard.

Let me demonstrate this reality by way of two different scriptures found in the Book of James. In James 1:2-4, we read “*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.*”

But while these “*trials*” are commended to us, listen to what James has to say about sickness. In James 5:13-16 we read, “**13** *Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them 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 them up. If they have sinned, they 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 person is powerful and effective.*”

God makes it plain that there will be times that we need to endure suffering, but we are always invited to pray for healing in the face of sickness. In Jesus, we see God’s will when it comes to healing and restoration. Jesus never described sickness as God’s tool to help us grow; He only ever described sickness as the result of Satan’s misrule in our world.

Now before I move on to the third hindrance, I want to briefly answer a question that someone emailed to me last week. The question was: *when a person is sick, is God punishing them for their sin?* I want to be careful in how I answer this, because there are two seemingly contradictory ideas that the Bible affirms at the same time.

First, the Bible affirms that all sickness, disease, and death are the direct consequences of sin’s presence in the world. Sin, sickness, and death entered the world when humanity first rebelled against God.

But **second**, the Bible rarely identifies a person’s individual sin as the root cause for their individual sickness. Now, there are a few exceptions: Miriam’s leprosy (Num. 12:1-13), Uzziah’s leprosy (2 Chron. 26:16-21), Elymas the Sorcerer’s blindness (Acts 13:8-11), and some of the sickness present in the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 11:28-34).

However, in those occasions where God did allow sickness because of specific sin, He spoke very clearly about why the person was being afflicted and how they could repent and find healing. Scripture rarely portrays sickness as personal punishment, or, as divine education. In those rare circumstances when God sent “sanctifying

sickness,” to modify sinful behaviour, when the behaviour was remedied, the sickness was healed.⁶

Again, think about it in terms of our own parenting. If we were to discipline our children but never tell them what they were being disciplined for, we would contribute to their confusion and fear, but not to any positive formation.

In keeping with James 5:16, when we pray for healing, we ask if there is any sin that needs to be confessed and repented of--not because sinlessness is required for healing, but because we want to be free from any barrier that exists between us and Jesus.

Now let me return briefly to our personal experience. If the Bible never affirms the inherent goodness *of* sickness, why then do so many Christians experience God’s goodness *through* sickness? I suppose that’s because no matter how bad things get, God never ceases to be good.

To borrow a poker phrase I heard a few years ago, “God can win with any hand.” God is constantly at work to redeem and restore, and while He doesn’t take any pleasure in sickness, He is at work in all things to draw us into union with His Son, the Lord Jesus.

I know many of you, and I’ve seen you draw close to Jesus through sickness--I am so proud of how you have trusted Jesus! And Jesus has been present to you in ways that has brought deep transformation. And if I can say it like this, you have drawn close to Jesus in your sickness, and as a result you have experienced God’s

goodness through something that is clearly in God’s “not good” category. And this is a testimony to God’s goodness, not to the “goodness” of sickness or disease.

Here’s the third hindrance to healing-- I’ve labelled it: The Faith Formula

Hindrane 3: The Faith Formula (A+B=C)

Those in this camp affirm that there is a straight, unambiguous, line between faith and healing. What we end up with is a kind of scientific formula: if the right people (the one asking and the one praying), have the right amount of faith, then healing is guaranteed: A+B=C.

illus: Naomi has an uncle that belongs to a faith-formula-church, and I have to admit it’s a fantastic formula except for all the times it doesn’t work. A number of years ago, Naomi’s uncle went blind in one eye. As you can imagine, both he and his community prayed for his healing again, and again, and again, but he has remained sightless to this day.

While I’ve never enjoyed solving mathematical equations, I am secretly drawn to them. There’s no “*maybe*” when it comes to mathematics; there’s no “*I feel*,” or “*I wish*.” I suppose the reason I am drawn to mathematical equations is because nearly everything can explained and solved. There may be great complexity involved in mathematics, but not a lot of mystery--there’s black and there’s white, with very little grey in between.

⁶ Blue, 26.

The same can be said of the faith formula--there is very little mystery involved. This formula assumes that healing is guaranteed--that God will heal everyone this side of heaven. And with this "guarantee," everyone else needs to play their part appropriately. With this guarantee, we know where to assign blame if a person isn't healed.

So let's get back to Naomi's uncle, and ask the all-important question: *what went wrong?* There's only a few possibilities. Maybe he had unconfessed sin in his life? Maybe he didn't have enough faith? Maybe the person praying for him didn't have enough faith? Or perhaps it wasn't a faith deficit at all, perhaps the person praying for him didn't have the right spiritual gift or enough anointing? But the difficulty is that if you've sought out people with ascending measures of faith and anointing, and you still haven't been healed, you have to look yourself in the mirror and put the blame squarely on yourself.

Naomi's uncle can't bring himself to see that maybe, just maybe, there's something wrong with the formula. There is no formula when it comes to healing because God can't be explained by a formula. With God there is great promise, but there is also great mystery; God has explained much, but there is much that we cannot comprehend.

Ken Blue writes that when it comes to healing, "we are dealing with a mystery: we are interacting with a sovereign and free God; we are confronting sin, demonic beings, and a host of psychological, physical and spiritual factors."⁷ The Kingdom of God is here, but it's

not here in fullness. In this life we experience both clarity and mystery, power and weakness, joy and pain, healing and sickness.

"The ministry of healing, like all other aspects of Christian ministry and experience is partial, provisional, and ambiguous."⁸ Next week I I'm going to pick up this idea and talk about the interplay between God's promise, His mystery, and His sovereignty when it comes to healing.

Any kind of faith formula puts too much emphasis on faith--it gives the impression that with the right kind (or amount) of faith, we can get God to do almost anything. God relates to us not because we work up faith, but because He is gracious, loving, and delights to be with us. It's not our faith that heals (the faith of the person asking or praying), only God heals, but, God does delight in our faith.

While the Bible makes it plain that there is a relationship between faith and healing, we need to refrain from defining this relationship too specifically. Here are four of many different examples of "faith" that resulted in Jesus' pronouncing healing:

- a. In Mark 9, a man approached Jesus on behalf of his son, but he wasn't sure if Jesus could do anything to help. In verse 22, the man said, "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us". Jesus replied saying, "If you can?" To which the man responded, "*I believe, help my unbelief!*" In other words, *Jesus, I don't know if I*

⁷ Blue, 40.

⁸ Blue, 91, 108.

believe, but I want to! This pseudo-faith was enough for Jesus, and He healed the man's son.

- b. In Matthew 8:2, a man approached Jesus and said, "*Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.*" In other words, *Jesus, I know you can heal Jesus, but I don't know if you plan to--this is faith that was bold enough to ask, and humble enough to not to presume.*
- c. In Matthew 8:8, a Roman centurion approached Jesus with great faith saying, "*just say the word, and my servant will be healed.*" Jesus spoke the word, and the servant was healed.
- d. In Mark 10:51, a blind man called out to Jesus from a crowd. Jesus turned to the man asked him, "*What do you want me to do for you?*" And the man replied, "*Rabbi, I want to see.*"

Jesus healed in the presence of pseudo faith, humble faith, great faith, and bold faith--He still does. There's no formula when it comes to Jesus and healing. Faith is less about knowing what Jesus **will** do in any given moment and more about an orientation--it's about orienting ourselves toward Him. It's saying, "*Jesus, I am yours and You are mine--I'm looking to You, listening to You, and following You. Jesus you are bigger than my difficulties, stronger than what opposes me, and You know how to love me in the middle of my mess. Jesus whatever You have for me, I gratefully receive.* This is the posture of faith.

The final hindrance I want to address this morning is more practical than theological..

Hindrances 4: Disobedience

I am convinced that one of the greatest hindrance to healing is our prayerless-ness; we do not receive because we do not ask. And while asking Jesus for healing is no guarantee that we will receive it, asking greatly enhances the likelihood.

We pray for healing out of obedience to the Scripture's command to ask. We engage in the ministry of healing because Jesus engaged in this ministry and has passed it on to us.

There is another hindrance that goes hand in hand with disobedience, in fact, this hindrance often hinders our obedience--I'm talking about fear. Have you ever asked yourself: *what would happen if I prayed for someone to be healed and they weren't? What would I say then? Wouldn't I damage their faith and God's reputation?*

For the last 15 years of pastoral ministry, I've been involved in prayer for healing. Over the years I've felt a greater and greater responsibility to be obedient in praying over broken bodies, minds, emotions, and relationships, and, I've felt less and less responsibility to "protect" God's reputation. I can't and don't guarantee that Jesus will heal someone in the here and now, and for that reason Jesus' reputation isn't "on the line."

But when people bring their brokenness to Jesus, what I can guarantee is that Jesus loves them and cares deeply about their pain. I can guarantee that Jesus knows your name; He knows where you are at in life. I can guarantee that every time we pray something will happen--Jesus is loving, present, and strong--you are not alone.

Let me encourage you this morning to cast off whatever hinders you; whatever your brokenness might be, bring it to Jesus.

balcony. As you come tear off a piece of bread, dip it in the cup and then eat with gladness.

The Lord's Supper

We gather this morning around two physical symbols: broken bread, and a cup filled with grape juice. The bread symbolizes the broken body of Jesus, and the cup symbolizes the shed blood of Jesus; Jesus' body was broken on the cross, and His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

Isaiah 53 speaks about God's suffering servant, saying "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

At the cross, provision was made for our forgiveness, for healing, and for life everlasting. As you come to receive the bread and the cup this morning, come asking for a fresh encounter with his forgiveness, come asking for a touch from His healing hand, come asking for Him to fill you with His life.

At this time I would like to invite all who are serving to make your way forward. As the band begins to play, you come up front to be served, or if you are seated in the balcony there are stations in the