

The Ministry of Healing in World Evangelization

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Avoiding Pastoral Pitfalls in conducting a healing ministry.

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1. Introduction

Conducting a healing ministry is a very difficult thing to do. It can trigger a wide variety of adversity by people who are concerned due to wide variety of reasons. There is a lot of material popular known which grossly misrepresents the issue as are certain attitudes put forth through the media. Skepticism is rampant and healing is often seen as a kind of deception.

Therefore the question arises: What do I have to be aware of when I try to conduct or introduce a healing ministry in a given environment? What are the common traps and the common misconceptions of people about healing? How do people react to certain ways of ministering?

Today churches often desire to have a healing ministry. But the way healing is done has to be adapted to the character and the people in the church.

2. Doctrine

2.1. You did not have enough faith to be healed!

It is common belief that one only can be healed when you have enough "faith". This is the common thinking in a strict cause and effect relationship¹. Put faith into God and you get healed. God is thought of as mechanistic and can be enticed to do healing when we have enough "faith" to offer for him. There is no support for this view in the Bible. People are healed without any faith at all.

In John 9 Jesus is healing a man who was born blind. Jesus did not require any faith of that man and neither explained to him who exactly he was. After the blind man was healed he was interviewed by the Pharisees. His answers make it plainly evident that he did not know who Jesus was and so also could not have had any faith in him. Healing cannot be only dependent on the faith of the one desiring healing².

Having a belief like this can be devastating to a healing ministry. It means that everyone who is not healed is guilty that the healing did not happen because he did not have enough faith. This is of course the easiest way out for the one ministering healing to somebody. What does this do to the one not healed? That one will fear that he is not accepted by God and desperately look for something that is wrong with himself. He certainly will not feel loved by God, but embark on a desperate search for guilt in himself.

2.2. Everybody must be healed

This thought stems from the same root as the above. Healing is not mechanic but is Gods divine will. Even the New Testament mentions people who are not healed. Paul advises Timothy to drink a little wine in his water for his troubles with his stomach in 1 Timothy 5:23. No procedure can insure healing and even the most positivistic thoughts and prophecies cannot insure healing. It has to be made clear beforehand that God is healing. We are his agents, but only God can do it. Healing is done to glorify God and his purposes and we are often ignorant of them or have a distorted view of them.

¹Ken Blue, "Authority to Heal", p. 41ff

²Another example in Ken Blue p. 45ff.

Healing can only be temporal. Eventually everyone will get old and die to be resurrected on the day of Christ. Healing is a piece of the Kingdom of God which is yet to come in all its fullness.

2.3. The Relationship of Faith and Healing

"Faith" is necessary for healing, but this faith is different than what is commonly understood by it. No faith that the healing will be accomplished but faith as trust in the benevolence of God, the faith that puts the trust for our whole life in God and rests in him³ is expected.

Jesus could not heal many people when he was in his home town because nobody had this "faith" in him. Everybody just thought of him as one of the town boys and therefore no one could trust him to be that what he preached.

Faith is necessary for healing for the one ministering as for the one ministered to, although there are exceptions. Again we have no strict rules, but generally faith makes healing possible because it allows Gods will to happen⁴.

2.4. Inner Healing and Physical Healing

In the medical profession it was often been observed that many of our common ailments are to some degree psychosomatic⁵. This means that the condition of our mind affects the condition of our body. The same is all the more true when we area concerned about spiritual things. It has been often reported that physical healing often took place when some inner problem was dealt with. For example it has been observed that arthritis and inner unforgiveness towards a person or bitterness often go hand in hand.

Therefore it is necessary to interview the ones to be healed to find if there is any unforgiveness or unconfessed sin in their lives which might have caused these symptoms. There might even be an influence there from generations prior who might have been involved in witchcraft or other sins. This has to be dealt with first and usually enable the physical healing that is desired, when first the inner garbage is cleaned up.

3. Practical issues

3.1. Publicity and Privacy

A person might feel embarrassed being prayed for in public. Things might be revealed which the one does not want to become public. The person should be able to exclude anyone from the ministry team that he feels not trustworthy. If gossip comes about as a result of administering healing there will be big trouble in the congregation as a result and people will be very cautious before revealing information necessary for healing making the healing ministry very difficult.

3.2. Legal problems

In large parts of the United States only licensed professionals can give medical or behavioral advice. Somebody might be charged for behaving as a professional without the proper education. One should therefore get informed on the legal regulations concerning counseling and how this applies to lay people or the clerical staff of a Church.

³Ken Blue p.103

⁴Ken Blue p. 97ff

⁵Dr. David Lewis "HEALING: Fiction, Fantasy or Fact?" p. 69

It might be necessary to make the person prayed for aware of the regulations and explain beforehand what exactly you are doing and what not.

In no case should a change in the medication be advised without first consulting the responsible physician! We need not prove to God that we believe that we are healed, but we trust in him that he will heal us.

The healing should be verified by one member of the medical profession if possible.

3.3. How much prayer?

Healing might not occur on the first prayer session, but might need some time. There are different kinds of healing most are gradual, some are instantaneous. If there is a difficult case it is often good to have repeated prayers for the same problems⁶. It is often helpful to have some people commit themselves to daily prayer for the person with the problem.

There are certainly limits to this approach. One is only able to pray for a certain number of people each day. Therefore this has to be limited by persons or by the duration or intensity of the prayer.

3.4. Listening to God

Healing is utterly dependent on God. During prayer ministry one should listen to God what his will is for this person. What could be the reason for this condition?

It is well done to start a healing ministry by inviting the Holy Spirit to minister to the one to be healed and help the ministers to understand what the Holy Spirits wants for the one ministered to.

4. Difficulties with Persons

4.1. Overzealous People

When the healing ministry is growing bigger often trouble starts in keeping the ministry in the right track. Some people have the tendency to "claim the healing" by insisting that one must behave as if the healing has already taken place. This is not truthful and can lead to great confusion with the ones prayed for.

Others might misuse the ministry in a similar way to instill their special beliefs on the ones prayed for. They have to be reminded that this is a healing ministry and no teaching or sermon time.

It gets really dangerous when the ones prayed for get pushed to do something or to take certain convictions to be healed. Forcing doctrine on others is not the way of a healing ministry. One should take care to rectify such behavior immediately before it gets out of hand⁷.

4.2. Wrong impressions

It is necessary to be very open toward each other when ministering healing to each other. The one prayed for should feel accepted and free to express what he feels and what is going on in himself. If no care is taken of this misunderstandings might result. People might get the wrong impression of what is done or what they should expect from the ministry.

⁶John Wimber "Power Healing" p.157

⁷Experiences gleaned from the leaders of the healing ministry at Glendale Presbyterian.

Some people are sensitive to touching. Therefore one should ask first if the one ministered to will feel comfortable if we lay hands on them. Laying on of hand might also be misunderstood if it is not properly explained beforehand especially male to female and vice versa.

It is specially necessary to make clear that we cannot do any healing on our own. Healing is done by God and therefore the glory for healing belongs to him. Similarly we cannot force God to heal a person or promise that one is healed.

4.3. Disturbed people

It is very difficult to pray for mentally ill people or people who are in some way mentally disoriented. It is sometimes impossible to find out where these people stand and locate what they really need prayer for. These people might deceive you through big blown up stories to get your attention.

We found it often difficult in the past to decide what course of action we should take with them. We do not want to reject them, yet we cannot constantly be concerned only about them. Often they desperately need help, but ask the question if you can invest enough time to be an effective helper? Often these people are already in psychotherapy so that there is the danger of interfering with their counselor. They might use the you against the counselor and the counselor against you. A lot of discernment is necessary when getting involved with mentally disturbed people⁸.

5. Ministers

As a pastor one is the role model for everyone else in the church. The way the pastor does the ministry is usually copied by others since he is the authority. Therefore the minister has to take special care in how he ministers to others.

It will be very difficult for a congregation to do a healing ministry if the pastor is not already involved in it.

5.1. The Holy Spirit and healing.

Healing is nothing to be planned or to be put in a certain scheme. Healing is done through the Holy Spirit on his conditions and not ours. Therefore one has to develop the ability to listen to the Holy Spirit and to carefully observe how he is working in your special setting. Adapt to the way he is working in your environment to make the ministry as fruitful as possible.

5.2. Is it real?

When ministering healing, we are setting out to do the impossible. This can be very frustrating to our Western Minds which are used to think in terms of cause and effect. We cannot cause healing in a direct sense. Healing does not fit into our frame of mind that is put on us through our society. Ministers have often reported that they have grave doubts about what they are doing even after years of ministering healing and after the experience of scores of healing!⁹ This is no reason to stop the ministry.

⁸Our own experience with some people over the years.

⁹Charles H. Kraft "Christianity with Power" p. 91ff

One good aspect of it is that frame of mind is a healthy one because it keeps us awake of possible misdirection we might go into. If we would be totally attached to this kind of ministry we might lose the ability to think critically about what we are doing.

5.3. Discernment

As a minister one needs to have a certain discernment to know what is right for the congregation and for the ministry. The minister usually directs the healing services and has a big influence over them. Therefore one should be clear about what one is doing and where one is going with the ministry.

Discernment is necessary especially for the people that will conduct the healing ministry. As noted above there are certain attitudes that will make it difficult to use a person in this kind of ministry. The pastor usually has the responsibility to handle the personal situation as well.

Discernment is also necessary when dealing with more difficult cases of demonization or people with an occult past. Sometimes it is really difficult to find out what the root cause of strange symptoms is. Is it a psychological cause or is it a manifestation of a evil force, or is it a mixture of these? It is very difficult to work through these issues and a majority of Pastors do not deal with these cases at all.

6. Introducing a Healing Ministry

6.1. Take the congregation with you

If healing is totally new for the congregation it is imperative that this new concept is not pushed on them. If the pastor is on his own way to discover healing as a way of ministry it would be very beneficial to take the congregation with you. Talk with them about your thoughts and get their feedback. Take them with you to important events. For example to a person that was healed (like R. Whitaker did in the Glendale Presbyterian Church). Make communal decisions. We are the body of Christ and not lone rangers out there fighting for ourselves. This acting as a community is often lost in our individualistic Western Society and therefore leads to the fragmentation of our society and of our churches.

The easiest way to begin a healing ministry is to encourage the building of small groups who are concerned about praying for the sick. People can learn in these small groups to have concrete fellowship with confession of sins and administering healing to each other. Only when there is this experience in small groups does it make sense to pursue healing in a bigger setting. People from these small groups will have experience, so that the ministry has more chances of succeeding when it becomes more public.

6.2. Be sensitive towards your tradition

It is imperative that a healing ministry is integrated in the teaching and tradition of the church. Just copying another ones successful healing ministry could destroy a church if it has not the same basis in doctrine and personalities as your congregation. It is necessary to develop ways of ministering healing to people that feels comfortable to your congregation with an awareness of the traditional beliefs of your church. How does healing fit into the general biblical teaching in this church? There must be some possibility to connect it into the general framework of teaching already done. After all a church has a lot to do with the Bible which is full of references to healing.

6.3. Time

It takes time until people really get comfortable with new things. They also need time to process what they have been taught and experienced. Therefore it is not to be expected that a healing ministry can be introduced in a day or a week or a month. Most likely it will take at least 1 to 2 years until the healing ministry has been integrated in the church in teaching and practice. Only then will everybody feel comfortable about it and can relate to it in practice and in the life of the church.

6.4. Prayer support

A healing ministry needs a supporting prayer ministry. Healing is a kind of spiritual warfare. The works of the devil are destroyed and the works of Christ are revealed. This is not very welcome to the enemy. Therefore this area is very sensitive to the influence of the enemy and needs a lot of prayer. Glendale Presbyterian's first healing ministry failed because of a lack of concern in prayer for it. After some years it was taken as granted and the prayer dwindled away. So did the effectiveness of the healing ministry and the interest of the pastor in healing. The Healing ministry experienced a revival when people began again to pray for healing.

A healing ministry takes prayer support teams to regularly pray for healing for individuals as also for the ones ministering healing to others. R. Whitaker does not think that a healing ministry should be performed unless there are at least two cell groups who are regularly praying for healing¹⁰.

7. Conclusion

There are many things to reckon with when conducting a healing ministry. Be aware of them, but not afraid since healing is a great witness to the world that the power of Christ is still available today and can lead to a significant expansion of the ministry of a Church. Healing is an expanding ministry today in many denominations and it seems that there is much to come in the future. Since it became clear in the 70s and 80s that Science cannot give any ultimate answers and that reality is ultimately non-deterministic (Heisenberg) Society has again begun to be interested in the supernatural. Christianity has always claimed to be supernatural therefore it is often expected to see effects of these supernatural forces in our time.

Rev 22:17

The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come."
And let everyone who hears say, "Come."
And let everyone who is thirsty come.
Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

¹⁰From his Seminar "Introducing a Healing Ministry without causing Fireworks in your local Church" at Glendale Presbyterians Healing Conference in Spring 1993.