



Healing

An Integrated Approach

Alison Morgan

God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.
Alan of Lille (12th century)

For many people the healing ministry remains one of uncertainty. The simple fact is that whereas Jesus healed all who came to him, that is not the case today. How are we to approach the whole question of healing? Is it more appropriate to pray for some kinds of healing than for others? Is there any simple way of making sense of the diversity of our experience?

A Jesus-shaped approach

Jesus rarely explained things as we have become used to explaining them. 'What is the correct application of the law to this woman caught in adultery?', asked the Pharisees. Jesus bent down and began drawing in the dust. 'Define the concept of 'neighbour' in the commandments', demanded a lawyer. Jesus told a story about a man who fell into the hands of robbers. 'What is the kingdom of God like?', people wanted to know. 'It's like a grain of mustard seed which a man sowed in his garden, and the birds came and built nests in the branches', said Jesus.¹ Jesus didn't explain by description or analysis so much as by metaphor, offering not exegesis or exposition but picture, parable and poetry. In a sense he didn't explain things at all: he invited us to imagine them.

Now to us, brought up in a world in which academic specialists use the intellectual tools of analysis, cross-reference, contextualisation and close attention to detail to offer explanations for the way things are, this seems distinctly unprofessional; few are the theologians who have chosen to work this way. And yet increasingly it is recognised that valid though these tools are for refining what we know already, it is only through metaphor that we can actually advance our understanding of the world and how it works. The Big Bang and the expansion of the universe, the curving material of spacetime, the tantalisingly simple imagery of string theory – the major scientific advances of our age have all taken place not by careful analysis but through creative leaps of imagination, by learning to look at the complex and unexplained in terms of the known and simple.

It is now widely accepted that almost all intellectual advance takes place by means of metaphor. .. Metaphor is not mere ornament, but an indispensable means of articulating the shape of reality. Metaphors are the means of interpreting one part of the world by another, by imaginatively transcending the power of language.

Colin Gunton

Seeing the big picture: a holistic model of healing

If on the one hand we tend to analyse, on the other we tend to specialise. We live in a specialist world, and we tend to minister in a specialist way. We engage in evangelism, we pray for the sick, we offer counselling and when necessary we pray for deliverance – and we tend to regard these as separate activities, best conducted by specialist practitioners. Not so Jesus. For Jesus all these things were intimately linked, part of the whole spectrum of the relationship between God and the human person. Jesus' vision of both life and ministry was a holistic one.

It was commonly said in the 12th century that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere – and for me this offers a wonderfully refreshing way of understanding the relationship between the human person, the world and the God of all creation. I have learned to imagine my life as water contained in a bowl, with God's first impact on me as the falling of a drop of water into the centre of that bowl. 'I am the way, the truth and the life', said Jesus, a statement that lands splash in the centre, clear and visible, at the moment of first encounter; and yet its arrival is a beginning, not an end, for from the point of impact spring concentric ripples which slowly move over the surface of the bowl in ever increasing circles. God is at the centre; but then it turns out that God is at the circumference also, as the impact of the ripples moves through one area of my life after another, leading me further and further into his presence. So my spiritual life starts with God and has to work its way out over the surface of the bowl from God, only to find its destination is also God. On its way it touches my spirit, my soul, my body and finally reaches out into the world I inhabit, the circles becoming less clear and distinct, less predictable and certain, but always moving out from the centre to the circumference, preparing me for my life in eternity – for the circle is the perfect figure of eternity.

Ripples of life : from centre to circumference

The same image helps me to understand the ministry we offer to those who seek the healing touch of God. God identifies himself to us from the beginning as a God who heals.² The primary healing we need is healing of the separation we suffer from God himself, that separation from the author of life which makes us subject to death. This healing occurs when the drop lands in the centre of the bowl for the first time, and we respond to the good news that through the power of the cross Jesus makes available to us a healing that is first and foremost a spiritual one, bringing freedom from sin and a restoration to God:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls. (1 Peter 2.24-25)

This was the primary healing that Jesus offered: 'Your sins are forgiven', he said to the paralysed man let down through the roof, and to the woman who poured ointment over his feet; and in that instant the man, and the woman, was reconciled to God.³ It is the most fundamental healing we receive, it lasts for all eternity, and it is available to all who want it:

To all who received him he gave power to become the children of God. (John 1.12-13)

Sometimes this spiritual healing takes a more active form; often in order to reconcile people to God Jesus had to deliver them from the presence of the demonic. This is a more difficult ministry than the simple proclamation of the gospel, requiring the authoritative exercise of obstinate faith; and yet experience suggests it too can almost always be achieved.⁴



Jesus frees a man from demons, Luke 8
Holkham Bible (C13th)

Our whole business in life is to restore to health the eye of the heart whereby God may be seen.

Augustine

And yet the human person is not a disembodied spirit. The scriptures teach us to see ourselves as spirit, soul and body, and to seek wholeness in all these areas.⁵ Following the image of the ripples spreading over the surface of the bowl, we move from spirit to soul or psyche - the mind, will and emotions. Inner, or emotional, healing is less easy to secure, but it also is an integral part of our relationship with God. It may be instant, but more often it is part of the ongoing process of maturing in Christ. Inner healing has a long history; confession of sin and prayer for a knowledge of the healing love of God has been a part of the spiritual life since the time of the very earliest churches:

I pray that he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that you may have the power to comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3.18-19)

Francis MacNutt suggests that 75% of those who request prayer for emotional healing receive it,⁶ and this chimes with my own experience; most of those to whom we offer an extended time of prayer ministry receive considerable relief from their emotional pain, and many achieve remarkable healing – often in unexpected ways. It remains an incomplete process, awaiting the final fulfilment of our eventual escape from this world of fallen relationships as we are finally reunited with God. But it is on this earth that it begins, as we seek to grow increasingly into the likeness of Christ. My observation is that without Christ, suffering and pain often gradually diminish a person; with Christ, these things act as grist to the mill of growth.⁷

Healing is as wide as creation and is the motive force within it. It must never be narrowed to a part of the whole.

Morris Maddocks

And then there is physical healing. And so it is that finally, as we move towards the outside of the bowl, away from the first impact of God's love into our spirits and further out into material reality, we find that this is given to us also – less predictably in a world ruled by the inevitability of death and decay, but given nonetheless; MacNutt suggests a figure of 50%. This was so for the man whose sins were forgiven; Jesus then told him to pick up his mat and walk. It was so also for a woman afflicted by an evil spirit, able to stand upright for the first time for years once her deliverance had been accomplished.⁸ Over the years I have prayed with many people who have received physical healing – from conditions as varied as RSI, arthritis, frozen shoulders, chronic head injuries, respiratory problems and in the case of my husband from a life-threatening road accident; but I have also prayed with many who have not. Ultimately of course they will, for in the eternal order of things our perishable bodies will be replaced with spiritual bodies; but for the time being we live in a physical world in which the created order itself is subject to decay:

The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for the adoption of our bodies. (Romans 8.21-23).⁹



Jesus heals 10 lepers, Luke 17, from an 11th century MS

Ripples of life : from circumference to centre

Finally, I observe that this process of the outworking of ripples from the spiritual centre of our lives to material reality on the circumference is sometimes taken in reverse. Often the drop of water lands in the centre of the bowl. But sometimes it seems

that it does not – and particularly so in the global south, where physical suffering is so much more profound than in the north. Sometimes, then, it is as if a gentle tap is applied to the outside of the bowl, and God makes initial contact with a person through physical healing. The ripples then flow not from centre to circumference, but from circumference to centre. It was so for the man born blind, whose physical sight was restored before his spiritual sight.¹⁰ It has been so for many who have responded to God in this way in our own times, through the ministry of local churches, anointed pastors and healing crusades all over the world.¹¹ Here too the progress of the ripple is not guaranteed; I have seen some receive physical, emotional or even spiritual healing without wishing to receive Christ and be reconciled to God. So it was for the man at the pool of Bethesda, who had to be warned that his physical healing was not the important issue.¹² And so our image helps us to the conclusion that prayer for healing is not a specialist ministry to sick Christians, but an integral part of Jesus's mission to the lost. Healing and evangelism are part of the same ministry of wholeness; part of the same pattern of ripples flowing from God and to God over the surfaces of our lives.¹³ The purpose of all healing is to draw us into his love.



What of the future? Well, one day the blur at the edge of the circumference will fade into a continuity with the One who lies outside it, and we will be united fully with God in a new heaven and a new earth not subject to the decay of the present order: a place where there is no more death, no more mourning or crying or pain - for from this place will flow not single drops but a whole river of living water, and on its banks will be the tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Here, and here only, will our healing be complete.

[Revelation 21-22](#)

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¹ John 8; Matthew 13; Luke 10.

² Exodus 15.26.

³ Luke, chapters 5 and 7. See the remark by John Wimber: 'the healing of our spirit, in which our relationship with God is renewed and restored, is the most fundamental area of healing. Without doubt the healing of our spirit is the lynchpin around which all other areas of healing revolve' – *Power Healing* (Hodder 1996) p.82.

⁴ Gospel examples abound. See Luke 9.37-43 (our failure); Luke 10.17-20 (our authority); Luke 8.2 (the healing from demons of Mary Magdalene). It is not hard to see that such ministry lies within the will of God; cp 1 John 5.14.

⁵ 1 Thess 5.23. It is important that even in eternity we will retain these three core components to our being – cp 1 Cor. 15.

⁶ Compared with 50% of those receiving prayer for physical healing; F MacNutt, *Healing* (1974), preface. He cites up to 80% in poor areas of the world.

⁷ 2 Cor 3.18; see also Romans 5.3-5 on the strengthening effect of suffering.

⁸ Luke 5; Luke 13.

⁹ See also 1 Corinthians 15.

¹⁰ John 9.

¹¹ For examples ancient and modern see J Wimber, *Power evangelism – signs and wonders today* (Hodder 1985).

¹² John 5.

¹³ The same Greek word *sozo* means both to save and to heal.