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We could be healed...
through prayer

Two kinds of people will be reading this chapter—the sick and the well. The in-between class, those who “just have something the matter,” are included among the sick.

We think of health or the lack of illness as being ideal. However, a lack of disease does not necessarily imply health. People can be weary, disturbed, depressed or discouraged, and still not have anything physically wrong with them. Physical illness is one thing, but the illness of the spirit is another. Sometimes these affect each other, more than we are willing to admit, more than we can ever imagine. The heart or spirit of man can be as sick as the body, and can need healing even more.

Recently I was reading an article in the *Chicago Tribune* on foster homes. I was interested to learn why hospitals have discontinued their wards for unwanted babies. Even babies know the difference between being loved and not being loved, and react ac-

cordingly. They become listless, stop moving around, lie on their backs all day, fail to show interest or response, and eventually fail to develop the strong bodies God intends them to have when they aren't given love. The doctors can order T.L.C. (tender loving care) on the chart, but who in the busy hospital has time to give it to them?

Adults can be classified in the same way: those who are loved and those who are not. In which classification are you? Love is such a personal matter. It is a person-to-person relationship. If you are remembering *when* you were loved or wishing you were loved, this chapter is for you. If you are one of the loved-right-now persons, this chapter is for you, too.

There is nothing like a new love affair to make a woman beautiful—a woman of any age! She blossoms! Her skin, her eyes, her hair, her voice, everything about her becomes filled with new vitality. Life itself takes on new meaning with the new love. A conversion experience or a fresh awareness of God's love can produce the same results.

Being loved is a matter of the heart, and so is prayer. Prayer is the language of the heart. Both involve giving-receiving relationships. Deny the heart either of these expressions, and it can soon become like a parched, neglected garden—no flowers, only dry dead memories—and desperately in need of spiritual healing.

Spiritual healing

I first heard the words "spiritual healing" through the Order of Saint Luke, Episcopal in origin but now inter-denominational. I remember saying the words over and over—*spiritual healing*. I thought about them. I liked them. When the spirit is sick . . . how is

it healed? When the spirit is well . . . how does it get sick? Is one healing enough? Physically we need healing many times, and I am convinced the same is true of spiritual healing.

Spiritual healing is the healing of the soul (the spirit) when by faith in God, through Jesus Christ our Lord, we receive the forgiveness of our sins.

I've given much thought to the many fundamental Christians whose one and only spiritual healing took place at the time of their conversion. None has occurred since their acceptance of Christ as their personal Saviour.

After conversion, where does spiritual healing come in? As Protestants, we confess our sins privately to God—when or where is our own business. Whether we do it at all is also our own business. That we seldom do is witnessed by our friends who also witness our afflictions, our illnesses, our attitudes not only toward ourselves but toward life in general.

Confession of sin can be compared to eating three balanced meals. If meals are prepared for us and we have a regular place to eat, we prosper; if not we suffer accordingly. By the same token, when there is a time and place for facing ourselves, our failures, our sins against God and others, and we learn to confess—we grow. If not, we suffer spiritual malnutrition and its attendant negative results.

Physical healing

An astute young psychiatrist recently told me it had been his original intention to specialize in internal medicine until it was brought to his attention that more than half the patients whom doctors treat are suffering from psychosomatic illnesses.

The importance of this subject has prompted me

in recent months to speak at least once on the subject of mentally-induced illness while conducting workshops on prayer. Not that anyone deliberately chooses to be ill! But all unknowingly the mind has incredible powers to dismiss and to suppress the unacceptable. The susceptibility of the body which must bear the brunt of this mental dismissal is likewise almost unbelievable.

Leslie Weatherhead's 500-page book *Psychology, Religion and Healing* (paper, \$1.75; Abingdon, Apex D-6) lists some of the illnesses which could be spiritual in origin: gastric and duodenal ulcers, some forms of skin irritations, allergies, asthma, spastic colon and paralysis. These illnesses may indicate not only disharmony between the mind and circumstances but also between the soul and God.

Another book which will stimulate your faith is by the late Dr. Edgar Sanford, *God's Healing Power* (Prentice-Hall, 1959). This is excellent reading and is filled with stories of real people.

To be healed spiritually or physically means that one is the recipient of God's power. "Ask and ye shall receive," said Jesus. Is that all one has to do to be healed? ". . . pray one for another, that ye may be healed," wrote James (5:16). Have someone pray for me? Learn to pray myself? Why don't people practice these two means of healing if they work?

If we could read each other's minds, it might help us to locate our tension points. But we can't. And half the time we can't accurately interpret our own thoughts, let alone make up our own minds. We know something is wrong, but cannot find the cause. Or, we can't face the real source of the trouble, so in order to bear the pain, we use our minds to rationalize the problem.

In my own life, I have many times unwittingly re-

pressed unpleasant things. The antidote or opposite would have been to recognize and face them. Mentally pushing problems away only results in having them come to the surface again as physical ailments. I suffered several gall-bladder attacks and was almost ready for major surgery when I discovered my basic trouble was not physical in origin, but emotional. It was insecurity.

This followed my resignation from the Oriental Missionary Society (because China became Communist) and occurred before I learned what the next step in God's plan for me was to be. Hadn't I prayed? Yes, I had. Didn't I believe God would show me? Yes, I did. Wasn't I trusting Him and His love? Yes, I was—that is, consciously, verbally I was. The proof that this was not sufficient became quite evident—severe and painful gall-bladder attacks.

Unconsciously, my mind had played a trick on me. My thoughts were in a turmoil of confusion and insecurity concerning the future and soon became physically manifest in a very real and painful way. I can't recall any specific dynamic healing, but I can recall reaffirming my belief in God's love and plan for me. And I can recall having friends lay hands on me to pray for my recovery. I did recover and have never since had another attack.

Later, I suffered from gastric disorders which eventually developed into a duodenal ulcer. I knew what was wrong, initially, but the symptoms continued for seven years after the cause disappeared. The cause was psychosomatic and mentally induced, but the pain persisted, and X-rays revealed scar tissue. Perhaps all ulcer patients are not psychosomatic casualties. I found it somewhat comforting to learn that many ulcer patients are high-salaried or creative people with many responsibilities!

In the course of my travels, I sometimes had a prescription from a new doctor. On one occasion, hoping to receive advice, I told the doctor what I believed was the origin of my trouble. He was not only embarrassed but changed the subject. I then realized why so many people needlessly suffer.

Why didn't this doctor help me? Because his practice dealt only with things physical. Should the dealings of spiritual illness be out of an M.D.'s line simply because he is not a clergyman?

This is where I believe we who call ourselves Christian are wrong. No matter what the need, as creative persons in whom God's Spirit lives we are all committed to one another, as the branches are to each other and to the vine. We are committed to help one another, pray for one another, love one another. No man lives unto himself alone. When one man finds his way, many find their way; when one man loses his way, many lose their way.

The Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, has combined all aspects of human illness—physical, spiritual and mental—in order to treat the entire man. More and more of this type of treatment is available, but church acceptance lags far behind. Congratulations to all who are moving in this direction!

My ulcers? Yes, they are gone. How did they go? When I prayed and confessed my failures, needs, and sins—both alone and with a trusted friend. I tried honestly to eliminate contributing causes. In prayer I listen for God's voice and try to live one day at a time. Since entering this present phase of my life—writing books, lecturing, and holding Prayer Workshops—I have been well. I have accepted God's love for me, and I have accepted myself as I am.

My own experiences have alerted me to the suf-

fering of others. Recently a friend told me how faith and prayer ended his asthma attacks, which were especially frequent during high school days. After he went to college he learned that asthma is often a psychosomatic illness generated by unrecognized guilt feelings or unsatisfactory relationships. Seeking God's help in prayer, he faced up and finally found the root of his trouble: his mother.

"I was completely freed from all symptoms of asthma," said D.S., "when I was able to forgive my mother, and to love her with the new love with which God strengthened me. I've been set free—from resentment and asthma."

In a certain city, a lady who was driving me to an appointment told me about her sister's three-year-old child, who suffered from asthma. I asked the question, "How do her parents get along?"

After several blocks of silence, the answer came. "Well, the wife wears the pants in the family."

I then learned there is also an eight-year-old son who suffers from skin allergies! Who could guess that subtle pressures, often unspoken between husband and wife, could affect two innocent children? Nor what would happen—if parents learned to listen to God and pray together? Afraid? Possibly at first, because of the changes honesty might bring, but not when some caring friend assures them of God's waiting love.

To be spiritually healed we must be in the healing presence of the great God who loves us. Being in His Presence means accepting what He wants to give us. Acceptance in all areas: the trouble, the estrangement, the silence, the denial, the delay, the resentment, the other person, one's self. Acceptance of God's love for me, just as I am. Acceptance of the other person, just as he is. Most of all, acceptance of

God's forgiveness, for what I have done and for the way I am.

Fresh, sweet, total forgiveness! Forgiveness is the most healing therapy in the world. To be forgiven by God, by our fellowmen, and to forgive ourselves—this is healing and this is wholeness. Can you remember when it happened to you? It should happen again. It can. It might cost you your private opinion, giving up your favorite "story," or your treasured resentment. But it just might be that in so doing, you will find healing and the blessing of release.



For reflection and thought

1. One friend, after reading my manuscript, wrote at the close of the last paragraph of this chapter: What about Amy Carmichael? Yes, sometimes God's saints are not healed. They are confined, and in the midst of suffering prove God's grace to be sufficient. Amy Carmichael was a great missionary to India's children, whose later years were spent in bed because of a bone that refused to heal. Her room became a literal shrine of healing to all others who stepped within.
2. Forgiveness. There is so much more that needs to be said on this subject. More will be written in chapters 14 and 15.

