

Way of Discipleship Small Groups

Can praying for others really make a difference? 2: Healing prayer and faith.



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.

Introduction: In this second session about some of the tricky questions we can face when praying for others we look at the role of faith in prayer. We will be talking about praying for healing, so just check that everyone in the group is aware and comfortable with discussing the area.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

What does praying with faith feel like to you?

Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

According to Jesus, faith can, to a certain extent, also be a factor involved in prayer. Yet misunderstanding the role of faith can lead to at best misleading and at worst destructive views of God.

This is particularly true in the ministry of healing – whether of body, mind or spirit. Just as Jesus demonstrated the rule of God breaking into the world by consistently healing people, so disciples have continued in His name to pray for healing as a normal part of Christian experience, whether by using a more sacramental approach with anointing with oil, or through direct and simple praying through the laying on of hands (or commonly, both).

The healing God brings is a foretaste of the wholeness we will experience ultimately when heaven and earth are reunited. Most Christians would see God's gifts of medicine and prayer not as opposites, but as working together. While being aware of all the factors we have mentioned so far which might have an impact on our prayer for healing, to join in with God's mission includes sharing in the ongoing healing ministry of Jesus.

In terms of grappling with questions around praying for others, it is often in the area of healing that the struggle can feel sharpest. Uncertainty about the role of faith in healing prayer in particular can challenge our picture of God, and our understanding of how to pray for others.



We can find ourselves in a dilemma if we pray for someone and they don't get better. If we see their continuing illness as "God's will", we can be effectively blaming God, or seeing Him as somehow wanting suffering. However, if, to avoid saying this, we say, "It must be to do with a lack of faith" we can end up making the victim feel blamed (even though we may not intend to).

As we have seen, there are more factors at play than God's will when we pray. Yet Christ consistently tells His disciples that their faith is a significant factor in praying for others. In the same chapter in Matthew Jesus heals a woman of bleeding, saying, "Take heart, daughter...your faith has healed you." He then heals two blind men: "Then he touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith let it be done to you"" (Matthew 9: 22 and 29).

Again, in Matthew Jesus' disciples fail to heal a boy who is possessed. When they ask Jesus why this is He replies, "Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." (Matthew 17:20)

We can perhaps wrestle with this by acknowledging that while faith is important in prayer, as we have seen, it is one of many factors involved. We could also point to the way that Jesus, like other Rabbis of His time, used the teaching technique of sometimes speaking exaggerated terms to make a point – moving mountains camels through the eye of a needle, for example.

There are other examples of times when it is clear that Jesus can only be speaking of faith as being an important principle, but not a formula. Even Jesus, who presumably had perfect faith, was sometimes unable to heal because of factors beyond His control – He was unable to do many miracles in His own hometown because of the lack of faith of others (Mark 6:5)

At the heart of this is knowing that when we pray for others, having faith cannot mean that we need to generate absolute certainty in our minds about the prayer being answered. Neither does it mean pretending that our prayer has been answered by "claiming it in faith." Jesus prayed for a blind man who at first receives his sight back only partially. Jesus' response isn't to blame the man or tell him to act as if he has been healed, but instead to continue praying until he is fully healed. (Mark 8)

When we pray for people or situations to be healed, because there are many variables we cannot be aware of, perhaps praying in faith is not about believing that the prayer will be answered in that moment.

Rather praying in faith can be more about how we set our hope in God and His promise to ultimately heal all things, and to trust that in that hope in our minds and hearts as fully as we are able. The key passage about the meaning of "faith" in the Bible is in Hebrews which talks about faith as "the substance/solidity of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

All the heroes of faith listed in the passage had a conviction that they were moving towards a future promise, even though they did not see them come to pass (Hebrews 11:13).

Praying in faith not certainty that they would see their prayer answered in that moment, but it was focussing their minds on what they hoped for as a solid reality. This created a conviction inside them that pulled them towards it.

As Greg Boyd says, “If I pray for a person in wheelchair with faith it doesn’t mean I know they will get out, it means I have a picture and a hope that this will happen. I can see them concretely being healed and I know it’s God’s will. This creates a desire, a conviction, which I press towards. But I know that that person will eventually get it – there are no wheelchairs in God’s future. But it will not necessarily happen now.”

Discuss: How much does faith as “a conviction which I push towards”, rather than complete certainty, make sense?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read James 5: 13-16 which describes the experience of having faith when praying for healing.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?



Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of praying for healing. How do you do it? What do you find helpful?



Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



Group prayer (5 minutes)

Holy Spirit, drive away from me all forms of sickness and disease.
restore strength to my body and joy to my spirit,
so that in my renewed health,
I may bless and serve you,
now and forevermore.

Amen.





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