



Why is Jesus' mandate to heal the sick still relevant to the 21st century Church? Before we try to grapple with the idea of the Ministry of Healing, we first need to understand why we do it at all.

Firstly because **Jesus did it**. Jesus "taught in the synagogues, preached the Good News about the Kingdom, and healed people with every kind of disease and sickness". Sometimes "He healed all those who were ill..." Sometimes it's just an individual who has sought Jesus' help: "Sir, if you want to, you can make me clean." Sometimes a group seeks Jesus help. Sometimes the request is for another person: "A government official went to Jesus and asked him to heal his son". Sometimes Jesus singles out certain people. At the pool of Bethesda there was "a large crowd of sick people", but Jesus chose just one person to heal. At Nazareth he was inhibited by their lack of faith: "He was not able to perform any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them." In Tyre he hesitated, waiting for a Gentile woman's show of faith.

Then **Jesus told us to do it**. "Whoever believes in me will do what I do---yes, he will do even greater things." "Go and preach the Kingdom of Heaven is near! Heal the sick." So, when Jesus said, "Go throughout the whole world and preach the gospel to all mankind" there is an implication that this includes healing as part of the proclamation of the Gospel, it cannot be separated from the Church's general mission.

And then **the Apostles did it**. In Acts 3:1-8 Peter & John healed a lame man, leading to today's reading. After that, all the believers joined together in prayer: "Stretch out your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus". We then read that "many miracles and wonders were being performed among the people by the apostles."

Finally **the early church did it**. "Is there anyone ill? He should send for the church elders, who will pray for him in the name of the Lord. This prayer made in faith will heal the sick person; the Lord will restore him to health, and the sins he has committed will be forgiven. So then, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you will be healed." James 5:14-16. From the earliest days of the Church there are written accounts of a Ministry of Healing and there are authorised forms given for the laying of hands on the sick.

This Ministry faded at the Reformation because by then the authorised forms were used only for the dying; there was a history of corruption and abuse; it was outside the Reformers personal experience; and it got jumbled up with superstition and magic. Separating Christian healing from occult practices became difficult.

Healing in the proper context is something done by God not humans. Prayer is in the Name of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit who directs us in all we do. But we, the members of the Church don't "Do" it, we are not "healers". We do not perform miracles. We listen and pray.

Jesus had no single formula, pattern, style or technique. He treated everyone as individuals. He met their immediate need and prayed for God's healing power as a *sign* of His Kingdom. We too do not follow any specific pattern or ritual but pray as individuals for individuals, because Jesus has said we the Church should do this to further His work in spreading the Gospel to all humanity. We follow Jesus in faith and leave the actual healing to God our Father.

"Healing" is a natural normal organic process created by God that carries on routinely within our bodies. We cut ourselves and, if the wound is kept clean, over time it will heal. Prayer for Healing is sometimes a prayer that medical staff with their God-given skills will do their best for a person.

Sometimes prayer can ameliorate side-effects of medical treatments or speed up the natural processes of recuperation. Prayer can result in a greater efficiency of the natural organic process of physical healing.

Sometimes healing can affect the psychological state of mind, healing the mental trauma of illness, giving the person greater strength and endurance while the normal physical healing process carries on.

Sometimes it's the calm acceptance that the natural outcome of a particular illness will result in death.

Sometimes the illness itself is caused or exacerbated by a psychological difficulty which can be helped by prayer. Maybe there are relational or social problems interfering with normal healing which can be addressed by prayer. Or perhaps the dysfunction at its root cause is a spiritual one, a grappling with bigger internal issues.

Humans can be seen as having physical, mental and spiritual components. Like the three legs of a stool, if any one of the three is damaged, the whole structure suffers. We cannot know even a fraction of what goes on within an individual, so we just pray for healing as channels of God's grace and leave the rest to him. Healing Ministry is done in the name of Jesus as a witness to him and the truths to which he came to testify. Healing done in this way points (as a sign) to the ultimate healing of Mankind's relationship with God through Jesus.