



Week Seven: Poor Health and Disease

Again, children seem to be the most vulnerable when it comes to any kind of world crisis. Health and disease are no exceptions. Two thousand children under the age of 15 are being infected with HIV worldwide every day, while nearly two million die every year as a result of diseases caused by unclean water or poor sanitation (a rate of five thousand every day). Many of these death-related illnesses do not need cutting-edge medical assistance to be solved. They just need willing Christians who have been equipped to administer basic care and training.



MONDAY

Jesus healed them, one and all

Reflect

From there he went all over Galilee. He used synagogues for meeting places and taught people the truth of God. God’s kingdom was his theme—that beginning right now they were under God’s government, a good government! He also healed people of their diseases and of the bad effects of their bad lives.

Word got around the entire Roman province of Syria.

People brought anybody with an ailment,
whether mental,
emotional,
or physical.
Jesus healed them, one and all.

More and more people came, the momentum gathering. Besides those from Galilee, crowds came from the “Ten Towns” across the lake, others up from Jerusalem and Judea, still others from across the Jordan.

Matthew 4.23-25 |MSG

I am the Lord, who heals you.

Exodus 15.26 |NIV

Receive

Jesus didn’t go looking for the sick, the diseased, the ill, the suffering. They came looking for him. They pursued him. They hunted him. And – for the most part – he let himself be found by them.

Jesus healed the sick.

Healing wasn’t a sideshow trick to draw in a crowd, create a following, and make a killing as he got to the *real point* of his mission. In fact, most of the recorded stories of healing are about healings intentionally done in the shadows, away from the crowd. Jesus consistently avoided public spectacle. He didn’t Twitter or Tweet. “He will not cry out, nor will his voice be heard in the street,” says Isaiah of the coming Servant. Healing was rooted in the reality of divine compassion. God is, fundamentally, a *healer*.

And because God heals, Jesus healed. And because Jesus healed, *we* heal.

When heaven and earth meet, *healing* is what happens.

Jesus' ministry was the vision of Isaiah 61 actualized, realized as the reign and rule of God broke into history through his person and work. Jesus wasn't about getting us out of here, it was about meeting us here; he wasn't as concerned about describing an idyllic future life as he was about alleviating the pain and suffering all around us in this life. This is why followers of Jesus are responsible for founding so many hospitals, so many relief organizations, so many charities dedicated to alleviating the suffering of this world.

God looked out upon the bitter pollution of a sick world, and, moved with compassion, he sent a healer out into the mix in the person and work of Christ – and he continues to do so through the person and work of those who follow him. “He that says he abides in him, ought himself so to walk, even as he walked.” We tend to relegate those challenging words to the realm of moral virtue and ethics, which leads us *inward* into a place of personal inspection and introspection. This is a necessary movement, to be sure. Let's just not forget the equally fundamental movement *outward* into a diseased world as we do what he did, “going about doing good and healing.”

God heals.

Jesus heals.

We heal.

End of story.

Or, more appropriately, the beginning of one ...

Relate

How is the reality of Jesus' healing ministry challenging you to imitate him as you encounter disease and suffering in the world locally and globally? How will you respond?

Respond

My Healer, my Jesus, help me to stop merely reading about your ministry on the page; take me to the streets where you are seeking to carry out that ministry here and now. Lord, increase my faith and give me boldness to take a risk and pray for your healing today.

Look for whom God wants you to pray for today and step out in courage and faith! He always answers our prayers with a “Yes”, “No”, or “Wait”. Today could be someone's “Yes” from the Lord through his resurrection power!

TUESDAY

He took her by the hand

Reflect

²⁹ After Jesus left the synagogue with James and John, they went to Simon and Andrew's home.

³⁰ Now Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a high fever. They told Jesus about her right away.

³¹ So he went to her bedside,
took her by the hand,
and helped her sit up.
Then the fever left her, and she prepared a meal for them.

³² That evening after sunset, many sick and demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. ³³ The whole town gathered at the door to watch. ³⁴ So Jesus healed many people who were sick with various diseases, and he cast out many demons. But because the demons knew who he was, he did not allow them to speak.

Mark 1.29-33 |MSG

Receive

For the next few days we will simply soak in some of the healing stories of Jesus. The reality is Jesus seemed to have a hard time being in the presence of illness without doing something about it. The more visible the pain, the more urgent the intervention. Even his enemies played on his compassion, on one occasion trying to get him bad press by getting him to heal on the Sabbath – the one day a “healer”, otherwise known as a physician, was not to practice his trade.

How did they try to lure him into their prepared trap? ... simply by placing a man with a diseased hand right in front of him in the synagogue. They knew he wouldn't be able to see the painful condition without having to do something about it. They counted on his compassion! And they were right. He did have to act ... right then and there.

No sooner had he left the synagogue than he had another encounter with pain in the person of Peter's mother-in-law. Once again compassion's hand could not be delayed. Carefully note the progression in the story. Jesus clearly demonstrated on more than one occasion that the proximity of his person was not required for healing to happen. Yes, he could have just said the word on the threshold, or even on the other side of town. But he *went to her*. Then he took her by the hand. Then he helped her sit up. Then the fever left her. Then she got up. Then she served.

Go. And do likewise.

Relate

Do you respond with compassion when faced with disease and suffering in the world, locally and globally? Think of a recent time when you encountered someone in pain and reflect on how you responded. What might God whisper to you in that moment if it happened again?

Respond

Compassionate Jesus, help me to see what you see and feel what you feel when people are in pain. Give me courage to go to them and love them right where they are at. Tear my apathy and my self-protective skin off my heart, so that I can be filled with your compassion.

Go the extra mile with someone God brings you today.

WEDNESDAY

I want to be clean

Reflect

A leper came to him, begging on his knees, “If you want to, you can cleanse me.”

Deeply moved, Jesus put out his hand, touched him, and said, “I want to. Be clean.”

Then and there the leprosy was gone, his skin smooth and healthy.

Jesus dismissed him with strict orders: Say nothing to anyone.

Take the offering for cleansing that Moses prescribed and present yourself to the priest.

This will validate your healing to the people.”

But as soon as the man was out of earshot, he told everyone he met what had happened, spreading the news all over town.

Mark 1.40-45 |MSG

Receive

The miracles of Jesus were all acts of love, as in this case with the healing of the leper. Lepers had the power to deeply move people, alright – to move them away in disgust and fear. But Jesus was deeply moved – *gutted* – with compassion for a man that, as Luke the physician relates in his telling of the same story, was *full* of leprosy.

Once again, Jesus could have pronounced healing from a distance, backpedaling as the leper advanced upon him. But he let him approach. He let him fall at his feet.

And then he did the unthinkable, the inconceivable. He reached out his hand and *touched* him. Who knows just how long it had been since this leper had experienced human touch! And Jesus reaches out and touches him. Jesus *wants* to heal him, and he does – not only the disease but also the social stigma attached to the leper because of it.

Christ followers are a similarly gutted people; a people constantly compelled to likewise reach out their hands and touch the diseased and sick of the world, fearing not contamination, but confident in the flow of healing and holiness through their touch and acts of kindness. It is always a race to see who is faster: the diseased and the lepers of our day as they rush towards a perceived door of relief – or disciples of Jesus as they run towards the lepers and diseased wherever they may be found.

Relate

Who am I afraid to love in my own family, workplace, church or neighborhood? What kind of healing “touch” do they need in their life and how can God use me to minister His love for them? How can I imitate the healing ministry of Jesus?

Respond

God, you are the source of love and comfort for all your children. Would you help me to break down barriers I have towards those who are hurting, those different from me, and the people who get lost in the margins of society? I want to emulate you to them and give them a healing heavenly touch that changes them eternally. Grow my heart and protect me from any fear of

man. Bring your healing power in your name Jesus!

Stretch out your hand to someone today. Ask the Lord for physical or emotional healing in their life, and offer them practical help through acts of compassion.

THURSDAY

What I do have, I give you

Reflect

¹⁻⁵ One day at three o'clock in the afternoon, Peter and John were on their way into the Temple for prayer meeting. At the same time there was a man crippled from birth being carried up. Every day he was set down at the Temple gate, the one named Beautiful, to beg from those going into the Temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. Peter, with John at his side, looked him straight in the eye and said, "Look here." He looked up, expecting to get something from them.

⁶⁻⁸ Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked.

⁸⁻¹⁰ The man went into the Temple with them, walking back and forth, dancing and praising God. Everybody there saw him walking around and praising God. They recognized him as the one who sat begging at the Temple's Gate Beautiful and rubbed their eyes, astonished, scarcely believing what they were seeing.

¹¹ The man threw his arms around Peter and John, ecstatic. All the people ran up to where they were at Solomon's Porch to see it for themselves.

Acts 3.1-11 |MSG

Receive

Typically, charities are looking for handouts when it comes to engaging with the ravages of epidemics and diseases around the world. But for followers of Jesus life is one momentous pass through the Beautiful Gate in which we do more than search our pockets for a spare-change handout, but rather risk the meaningful hand-up.

We are an upstream-moving people who get involved.

We are a people who risk getting our hands dirty.

We are a people who don't dream about what we might be able to do some way, some day, but we, right here and now, give what we have – which generally will involve our time and our presence and not just a quick slide of a credit card.

Rather than looking away or excusing ourselves from needing to respond, we are called like Peter and John, to stop and to *see* the heart of the matter. Note carefully the order. They stopped. They saw. They extended their hand.

It's worth noting that the basic Hebrew word for "heal" means essentially to snatch up and mend.

The healer is a mender of souls and bodies. The healer stops. She sees. She engages. She extends her hand. She offers presence.

Relate

We all have different gifts and skills to offer someone as we stretch out our hands to give them a hand up. Some of you may be physicians, dentists, or work in the medical field where you have real-life expertise to help the sick and the poor who can't get the medical attention they need either locally or in the developing world. Others of you have a gifting or passion for education and can teach about hygiene, sexually transmitted diseases, and prevention of diseases that

actually saves lives. Others of you have real spiritual gifts of praying for healing, or extending mercy ministry, and can help provide things like hygiene products, prenatal vitamins, clean water, clothes, shoes, mosquito nets, etc.; all things which can prevent diseases and poor health. What do you have to offer locally? What do you have to offer the diseased poor in the developing world?

Respond

Living God, help me to not turn my head away or justify why I shouldn't help when someone asks me for a handout. Help me see what gifts and skills you've given me to extend to others for the sake of your kingdom. Let your love shine through me in spirit and in truth, in word and in action. Let me care Jesus, because you care; let me help bring healing because you brought healing and love through stretching out your hand of grace.

When someone asks for a handout, instead of giving money, which sometimes feeds addictions, have love packets in your car that contains a water bottle, hygiene products, granola bar, and scripture for their soul. You can involve your whole family in the process and then have something to give that will help and not perpetuate their problems.

Investigate ministries in your area that help give a hand up to people. They could involve medical care for people without insurance, dentistry services, medical outreaches, mercy ministries, and education. If there's a need in your community, how can your church help be part of the solution?

FRIDAY

I was sick, and you cared for me

Reflect

Then the King will say to those on his right,
'Come, you who are blessed by my Father,
inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world.
For I was hungry, and you fed me.
I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink.
I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home.
I was naked, and you gave me clothing.
I was sick, and you cared for me.
I was in prison, and you visited me.'

Matthew 25.34-36 |NLT

Receive

These are the grim statistics of AIDS, but they do not tell the story of the men, women, and children whose lives have been destroyed. In Africa they say that when it comes to HIV, everyone is either *infected* or *affected* – no one escapes completely. If we think of AIDS only as a medical crisis with a medical solution, we misunderstand it. AIDS is a sociological tsunami that is eviscerating much of Africa.

Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*

AIDS and HIV. Tuberculosis. Malaria... here are many diseases that ravage whole communities and we must look at them holistically if we really want to solve the crisis. Malaria is a medical crisis, but also an environmental one when stagnant water breeds the mosquitoes that carry the virus. HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases present, must also be prevented through education if there's going to be any real lasting change. As the church, we are called to go "up river" and find out the root causes of these medical crises around the world, so that we can see true healing and hope come.

Richard Stearns asks, "What about the average life expectancy for a child born today? In the United States it is seventy-eight. But for Sub-Saharan Africa, it is just forty-seven, and for the worst countries, especially those impacted by HIV/AIDS, life expectancy, is between thirty-five and forty."

Such a reality demands more than a "that's terrible" shake of the head. It demands a *visit*.

"I was sick and you cared for me; I was in prison and you visited me." I've done my share of prison visits. But this is more than going on campus and sitting on the other side of thick glass in relative safety. Such "visiting," biblically, involves the great truth of *incarnation*. It calls for a "God-with-us" moment when we move beyond the glass and enter the cell, when we walk into the cubicle of the sick and, as Christ did, take the sick by the hand. We are not merely called to contribute. We are called to contact ... somewhere, somehow, with someone "of the least of these."

It's less about what we can do FOR someone (charity), and more about what we can do WITH someone (compassion). When we visit and walk with the least of these, our hearts are truly transformed into the hearts of Christ.

Statistics of world disease and epidemics make such contact urgent. In Christ's teaching, "contact with those who are suffering" acts somewhat like a litmus test: a test of our hearts. Are we suited to sit around the Son of Man's circle of compassionate ones?

God heals.

Jesus healed.

And, filled with his compassion, we *do* compassion; we join in the work, as interns making local and global rounds through whatever Beautiful Gate the Great Physician may lead us.

Relate

How is the reality of the healing ministry of Christ challenging you to imitate him as you encounter disease and suffering in the world locally and globally?

Respond

Healing Christ, help me to stop merely reading about your ministry on the page. Take me to the streets where WE can so minister, here and now. I want to "do the stuff" with you!

What is one thing you can do WITH the least of these, and not just FOR them?