

## **Defining the Issue**

We live in a world marked by sin and the curse (Genesis 3), groaning under the weight of the fall and awaiting our final redemption when Christ returns (Romans 8:18-22). Because of these foundational truths, our bodies experience sickness, decay, and death in this life. As leaders in the church, we are commanded by God to pray for the sick (James 5:13-15), that God would be merciful to them, forgive them their sin, and heal them from their affliction. However, God does not always heal immediately in response to our requests. His ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9), and we trust Him regardless of what He chooses to do. The elders of Cityview Bible Church have written this position paper on physical healing in order to help our leaders and members develop a biblical, God-honoring perspective on healing and to have greater love for people within their span of care.

First things first...

## **God Gets All the Glory**

Whenever we experience physical healing in this life, whether by our body's ability to self-heal, a doctor's ability to diagnose and treat, or a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, God receives all the glory and praise (Psalm 29:2). As the Creator of the physical body (Genesis 1-2), God is the source of every experience of healing today (Exodus 15:26) and the hope of ultimate healing in the future (Revelation 21:4).

Whenever we don't experience physical healing in this life, we trust that God's character is unchanging and consistent with the biblical witness (Hebrews 13:8), and we rest in His eternal purposes, knowing that He is working all things eternally for our good (Romans 8:28). We don't blame people for their sickness, but trust in God's love and care for His people. We know that even if healing does not come in this life, eternal healing comes to those who belong to Jesus (1 Cor 15:38-46). God gets all the glory in healing and sickness, life and death, because He is good and worthy of our praise (Psalm 145).

In all situations...

## **God's Character Never Changes**

**God is our Loving Father** – God is a loving Father to His children – all believers in Jesus Christ (Psalm 103:13). Jesus teaches us that God is a loving Father who runs to His children and embraces them in His loving arms whenever we repent of our sin and turn to Him (Luke 15:20). God's love for His children does not change based on their circumstances or physical health.

**God is Sovereign** - God is sovereign and in complete control of our lives today (Isa 46:10, Psalm 135:6, Prov 16:33, Eph 1:11-12). He is not the author of evil or sickness, but He allows people to experience suffering, sickness, and death according to His eternal purposes. The mysteries of God's ultimate plan are unknowable to us today but must always align with His revealed character in Scripture.

**God is Good** - God is good regardless of our circumstances (Exodus 34:6, Mark 10:18, James 1:17). He is the source of ultimate joy which cannot be taken away by sickness or death. The greatest gift that God can give to us is Himself because we are fully alive when we are in right relationship with our Creator.

What does God promise us now?

### **God's Immediate Promises**

**His Presence** – God has promised His people that He will never leave them or forsake them (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus promised His disciples that He would be with them, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). Regardless of what happens to our bodies in this life, our confidence is in the presence of God with us which removes fear and grants us courage (Joshua 1:9). We know that the Spirit of God is in us and with us in every situation.

**His Love** – One of the greatest promises for believers in Jesus Christ is that nothing in this life can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:31-39). God doesn't promise to deliver us from suffering or loss or pain or death in this life. However, He does promise us that His love will sustain us and never leave us regardless of the difficulty of the trial we face.

**His Grace** - Healing from sin's eternal consequences is infinitely more important than healing from the temporary effects of sickness (Romans 3:21-26). Eternal reconciliation with God is the ultimate blessing of the finished work of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21). Our greatest need is not temporary removal of sickness from our bodies, but the eternal removal of the wrath of God against our sin, reconciliation with God as our Father, and final freedom from sin (Acts 2:37-41). In Christ, we receive the ongoing grace of God which covers our sins and changes our hearts (1 Timothy 1:15-17).

**His People** – When God saves us from our sin, He places us into His body, the church (Ephesians 2:11-22). The people of God are a great gift of encouragement and comfort to one another in times of trial and difficulty (2 Corinthians 1:3-7). God uses His people to support us in times of weakness and to encourage us to pursue godliness (Hebrews 10:23-25).

**His Word** – God gives His people the gift of His unchanging Word (Isaiah 55:10-11). The Word of God is living and effective, and is able to encourage the weak, rebuke the proud, and strengthen the downcast (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We should remain grateful that God has revealed Himself to us by His Word so that we know who He is and have hope for the future (Psalm 19:7-11).

What then does God promise us in the future?

### **God's Eternal Promises**

**The End of Death** – God has conquered the power of death through the resurrection of Jesus, but He has not yet removed death from His creation. This is an important distinction to remember – *God can be victorious over something (such as sin, death, and hell) without removing it completely from His creation.* Until Jesus returns and makes all things right, every person who lives on this earth will experience death and then stand before God (Hebrews 9:27). Jesus will ultimately destroy death completely when He returns and resurrects His people from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

**The End of Sickness and Suffering** - God promises to destroy all sickness and suffering when Jesus returns and establishes the new heavens and the new earth (Revelation 21:3-4). At that point, God will remake His creation into its original form (as it was in the Garden of Eden) and remove the weight of the curse. When Jesus walked on the earth, He gave us a foretaste of the coming Kingdom by healing MANY people from their physical sicknesses (Luke 4:18-21 and Matthew 8:16-17). However, Jesus did NOT heal everyone alive on the earth and He did NOT remove all sickness from the creation. The final removal of sickness from the creation will occur in the new heavens and new earth.

**The End of Sin and Injustice** – In the same way that God promises to destroy death, sickness and suffering, He also promises to destroy sin and injustice (Isaiah 65-66). As we wait for the return of Jesus, we will battle sickness and sin. Temptation to sin will remain, and we must be diligent in our fight against sin (Romans 8:12-13). Then, at the end of time, Satan will be finally destroyed (Revelation 20) and with him, the presence of sin, injustice, and death.

What does this mean for our struggles today?

### **Our Struggles with Sickness and Suffering**

**Sickness and Suffering are Real** – While we wait for the return of Christ, we live in a world full of sickness, suffering, and death. Every godly man and women in the Bible suffered (Moses, Joseph, Job, Hezekiah, Jesus, Paul, etc.) and those who obeyed God most fully suffered most severely. Suffering and sickness are normal in this life. Sickness does not mean you have disappointed God or are outside of His will for your life. Many times, God takes us through seasons of suffering and sickness for our own sanctification and growth.

**God Doesn't Always Heal** - Jesus' miraculous healings were given by the Father to authenticate His identity and mission, but Jesus did not heal everyone and those He did heal eventually died. His ultimate mission was not temporary healing. His ultimate mission was defeating sin, death, sickness, injustice, and hell through His death and resurrection. Healing is not guaranteed or promised by God now. To promise healing to others now or to prophesy healing over people is to say more than God has said today and to give people false hope in the short term. God decides if or when He will heal people today. God wants us to bring our needs to Him in prayer, but then to submit our requests to His eternal wisdom and will.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul asks the Lord three times to remove his "thorn in the flesh" which was causing Him torment and pain. While we don't know the exact nature of his thorn in the flesh, we do know that it caused him discomfort, that he prayed faithfully for its removal, and that the Lord's answer was "no." (see 2 Corinthians 12:6-10) When the Lord Jesus Himself was approaching the suffering of the cross, He asked the Father to take the cup of suffering from Him. At the same time, Jesus submitted His will to the Father's will and agreed to obey despite the cost. (see Matthew 26:39) The point is that the Lord wants us to bring our requests to Him as a good Father and to trust Him when He says "no" to us in the short-term.

At Cityview, we deny any theology or teaching that promises full health in this life if you give enough, believe enough, or say the right words in your prayers. These are anti-gospel teachings, since the true gospel roots our relationship with God to the finished work of Christ, not our work for Christ. True faith in God means that we trust Him regardless of the answer He gives to our prayers.

How then should we minister to the sick?

## **Our Ministry to the Sick**

**Praying for the Sick** – we pray in faith (asking boldly for help, trusting the Lord), always surrendering our will to the will of the Father. God wants us ask Him for help when we are sick (Psalm 41:1-3) and ask the elders of the church to pray over us in our times of sickness (James 5:14-16). Jesus commanded His disciples to pray for the sick as they went out on mission (Luke 10:1-12). When we pray for healing, we pray in faith (Mark 11:23-24), trusting that God loves us, hears us, and knows what He is doing. At the same time, we pray with a heart that is fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ and surrendered to His sovereign will (Matthew 26:39). We know that it honors the Lord when humble ourselves before Him (James 4:10) and we ask persistently for help (Matthew 7:7-11). Part of our ministry to the sick is to intercede faithfully on their behalf.

**Caring for the Sick** – while prayer is our primary ministry, it is not our only ministry. We are also commanded to care for the sick and hurting. Jesus taught us in Matthew 25:31-46 that when we care for the sick, we are caring for Him. In Luke 10:30-37, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan, who stops and cares for the man in need. Surely, one application of this story is to use our money, time, and energy to care for the sick. We are especially commanded by God in Galatians 6:10 to care for the family of believers. This means that while we pray for the sick, we also do whatever is in our power to ease their suffering and provide for their needs.

**Waiting on the Lord** – at the end of day, we use our voice to encourage the sick to keep their eyes on Christ, the One who suffered in their place so that their sickness will not last forever. Jesus died on the cross for our sins to provide for our eternal healing (Isaiah 53:5). In this life, that healing begins with the forgiveness of our sins and adoption into God's family (1 Peter 2:24). In eternity, that healing will include our physical bodies (1 Corinthians 15:22-24). At the return of Christ, our current bodies will be resurrected, and we will be given eternal, heavenly bodies without defect or corruption. In this way, part of our ministry to the sick is to remind them of the Hope to come and the importance of waiting on the Lord and His perfect timing (Psalm 130:5-6).

## **In Conclusion**

To summarize the biblical teaching on physical healing, let's start with balancing the truth that God is our Healer (Exodus 15:26) AND the One who gets to decide at what time He heals us (2 Peter 3:8-9). As we pray for the sick and wait on the Lord, we trust that God is good all the time. If He heals quickly, we give Him praise and thank Him for His kindness. If He waits to heal until eternity, we give Him praise and thank Him for His promises. Either way, we rest in the loving arms of our Heavenly Father who has adopted us into His eternal family through the work of His Son and given us the Spirit to comfort and guide.

As elders of Cityview Bible Church, we want our whole congregation to pray boldly and faithfully for those facing physical sickness and challenges, AND to trust that our loving God is in charge of every detail of our lives and the ultimate timing of our deliverance. He is a good, holy, sovereign God, and worthy of our worship in every season of life.