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Healing on Demand



Word of Faith - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg provides a perspective on divine healing, highlighting that while God does heal, healing is not always guaranteed. He challenges the idea that sickness is something detested by God, drawing from biblical passages to support his stance. Gregg emphasizes the importance of understanding the reasons why suffering occurs and the potential higher purpose it may serve. Highlighting the role of faith and signs, he encourages believers to trust in God's grace and to see afflictions as an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Transcript

on healing because the Word of Faith has brought a tremendous emphasis on the matter of divine healing. It is possible that if one attacks the Word of Faith and their teaching about healing that that person may be accused of not believing in divine healing or not being a believer in the supernatural. Unfortunately, although many major denominations, including Pentecostal denominations, have formally renounced the Word of Faith doctrine, it is privately and publicly believed by, I don't know, possibly the majority of Charismatics.

I don't have any statistics so I can't say. I'm only judging from the prevalence of it in the Christian charismatic media, which would be the Christian television networks and Charisma magazine, which is of course probably the leading official organ of the charismatic movement. Not that that movement is a monolithic movement where everyone agrees with each other, but certainly from these sources, from the Spirit for the Life Study Bible, from Charisma magazine, from the major networks, the impression one would certainly get is that Charismatics are believers in the Word of Faith teaching.

Now I'm a Charismatic and I have not for the past twenty-seven years been a believer in the Word of Faith teaching, but I've been nonetheless Charismatic if by Charismatic we define one as a person who believes in the Charismata. That's where the word Charismatic comes from, a person who believes in the Charismata. And the Charismata is simply the Greek word for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

There are those who are non-Charismatic who believe that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not for the Church at any time after the time of the first century and the death of the Apostles and the completion of the canon of the New Testament. That with the turning of the first century just about, there was also a turning in God from his erstwhile methods, which for thousands of years he had employed in dealing with his people, speaking prophetically and operating supernaturally with them. Apparently after the book was completed many people believed that God changed entirely from what he had always been and did not function that way anymore.

So that we might now just learn what the book says and we don't need any direct dealings with God anymore. This, I hope, is not too unkind a caricature of the non-Charismatic position, but it strikes me as that's what comes up in discussions with them, that that is the assumption. And having spent the first twelve years of my Christian life in a non-Charismatic environment without any awareness of the gifts of the Spirit, I don't think I'm altogether unqualified to represent its position.

The Charismatic simply believes that God who we deal with today is the same God that the Apostles dealt with and the Prophets before, and Moses and Adam and Noah and those people who heard from God from time to time and who experienced the miraculous from time to time. Whether it was the miraculous opening of the womb of Sarah, whether it was the miraculous flood in Noah's day and other judgments of Sodom and Gomorrah and so forth, or whether it was miraculous healings or plagues upon Egypt or whatever. God is a God of the miraculous and healing has its precedence in the Old Testament where Prophets healed sick people and even raised the dead.

And of course it is underscored as a major work of God in the ministry of Jesus Christ who said, the works that I do are not my own. I don't do them of my own authority, but they are the Father's works. He said, if you don't believe me from my claims alone, believe the works.

He said things like that rather frequently, but one example would be John 14 when Philip said, Lord, show us the Father. And it suffices us in verse 8 of John 14, Jesus' answer is, have I been so long with you yet and you have yet not known me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father, so how can you say, show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak of my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does the works. So Jesus was a manifestation of God's works and we see that healing is a very dominant, occupies a very prominent place in the ministry of Jesus and must therefore be a prominent concern of God.

It continues on in the book of Acts. Peter and Paul and apparently Stephen and Philip also seem to have all operated in healing ministries and other apostles the same. So we can say that healing is a work of God.

It's a rather characteristic work of God. It's not a bizarre, uncharacteristic work of God. It is the kind of thing God might be expected to do.

Now at the same time, we should not jump to the conclusion without scripture warrant that healing is something that God always will do. We certainly don't find it the case in the Old Testament, although God did heal a leper or two or three in the Old Testament and he did heal other diseases and raise the dead. He didn't raise every dead person, not even every righteous dead person.

He didn't heal every righteous sick person and this is true also of the ministry of Jesus and of the apostles. So we need to put healing in its proper perspective. God is a healing God, quite capable and willing to heal in many cases and when he does so, he's not acting in an uncharacteristic manner.

But when he does not heal, he also is not acting in an uncharacteristic manner. Healing or not healing, apparently, is at his prerogative and he does so as he sees fit, as he sees that doing so will advance some concern, some purpose that he has. So I want to make sure that we put healing in perspective.

If someone is said to not believe in healing or not to believe in the supernatural because they do not believe the Word of Faith doctrine, it's unfortunate because the Word of Faith doctrine do not own the doctrine of healing. They simply have perverted it and turned it into a cultic obsession. Let me try to be biblical in a proactive sense, not just debunking what other people say, but to try to speak positively of what the Bible does say.

In our last session we talked about the claim of many that the healing of physical sicknesses is a provision of God to us, available by faith, provided through the atoning death of Jesus, just like the forgiveness of sins is. I have suggested and I have sought to document biblically that the Bible does actually not teach any such thing. It is not strictly the Word of Faith people who believe it.

There are non-Word of Faith people who hold that particular view, that healing is in the atonement, but it is definitely a core of the Word of Faith teaching as well. But the Word of Faith teaching goes further. Actually, to tell you the truth, the Word of Faith teaching is more consistent.

If you believe that healing was provided in the atonement, then the Word of Faith teaching about healing on demand seems to be consistent. If a person believes that healing is in the atonement but does not believe that all Christians can be healed upon the exercise of faith, then that person has got a disjunction in their logic somewhere. They have got a premise and a conclusion, but they do not follow.

It seems clear that whatever Christ has purchased for us is for us to obtain. If it is

withheld from us, that is cheating. That is unjust.

And if the means by which benefits are appropriated from God is the means of faith, as we all know to be biblical and true, then it would follow that if Christ has purchased our healing in the atonement, then anybody who has faith can have it, can be healed. And the terrible flip side of that is that anybody who is not healed can therefore be concluded to not have faith. Now, I do not believe, of course, that healing is in the atonement for reasons I gave you in our last lecture, and I do not believe in healing on demand.

What I am saying is that those who do believe the one doctrine and do not believe the other are not thinking clearly. The Word of Faith people at least are thinking clearly. They start with a premise, I believe a wrong one, but they reason logically to what I believe is a very wrong conclusion, not by an error in their logic but an error in the beginning of their reasoning, the first premise from which they launch their reasoning.

Now, there is therefore a mindset widespread in the Christian Church that there is something about sickness that God detests, just like there is something about sin that God detests. Sin obviously is abhorrent to God, and many people believe that sickness is also abhorrent to God. It is not exactly clear why sickness should be as abhorrent to God as sin.

I do not think it is, because God is not tolerant of sin in the believer, but he is tolerant of sickness, I believe. You see, sickness is just a form of trial. It is just a form of suffering.

Sickness often is just a natural consequence of living in a world where sickness is widespread, and you can contract a disease simply by being in the presence of a diseased person in many cases. Now, when you do have a disease, you are suffering, but no one can really argue on a biblical basis that suffering has no use in the believer's life. There are too many scriptures that say that suffering is beneficial, at least some forms of suffering.

The Word of Faith people generally will say, although there probably are some who would not say quite this, but I have heard it said frequently enough, that of course God allows us to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ, but that is the only kind of suffering we should ever be subject to. Our persecution for Christ's sake is a sign of our loyalty to him, a test of our love for him, and so forth. Many Word of Faith people would agree that suffering for Christ's sake from the hands of wicked men is not something that we are immune to.

Now, I think I have heard some Word of Faith people say that even persecution can be avoided if you have enough faith, but I don't think that that is mainstream. The Word of Faith people I have heard from believe that Jesus redeemed us from poverty and sickness and death, which they identify as the curse of the law, and because of that they believe that there are certain kinds of suffering that we have been redeemed from and

we should never accept as normative. Sickness, for one, because we have been redeemed from sickness, and poverty for another because we have been redeemed from that.

They would not necessarily say we have been redeemed from persecution, but some of them would say that if you can have whatever you say, you certainly could, of course, avoid persecution or any other unpleasantness too simply by having what you say and saying the right things. So there is not a great deal of total consistency in this question of which sufferings we should accept and which we should not. But I would like to say that I see nothing in the Bible that makes a difference between sickness and any other kind of suffering, whether a suffering is inflicted by wicked men, and we call that persecution, or whether that suffering is inflicted by microbes, we call that sickness, or whether that suffering is caused by economic conditions in the country where people end up poor and in poverty, whole nations in poverty.

I mean, it is all suffering. What is the moral difference between sickness and any other kind of suffering? And how could one justify God allowing us to suffer in one way, but he is evil if he lets us suffer the other way? You see, the Word of Faith people say God is too good to afflict us with suffering, with sickness. He would not want us sick.

What parent would want his children sick? Therefore, if you say that sickness is the will of God, and that sickness is good for you, and that it is not sent from the devil and so forth, that you are maligning God. And yet, many of the same people would say, well, God does think it is good for you to suffer persecution. That works something good in you.

The question that comes to my mind is, what is it innately about persecution that makes it good for me that would not make sickness good for me? Or to put it another way, what is it about sickness that is so dreadful that God would be not a good God if he wished me to be sick, but that dreadful does not apply to persecution, which can include torture and even martyrdom. But God is not an unkind God if he wants me to go through that. Now, of course, the only thing on the surface that makes one different from the other is that one is distinctly done as an act of obedience to Christ, through remaining faithful to him and suffering persecution.

But that in itself does not make persecution any less a painful experience than suffering, as a matter of fact, or sickness. Many forms of sickness are milder than some forms of persecution. According to the Word of Faith people, we should never have so much as a headache or a toothache or an infection of any kind.

That should not be, because that is sickness. But what if you are dismembered? What if you are tortured day in and day out? I dare say that if one is looking for a comfortable lifestyle, there are many people who would choose sickness over persecution, given that some kinds of sickness are worse than others and some kinds of persecution are worse

than others. But certainly you cannot make a categorical difference.

But suffering sickness is worse than suffering persecution in terms of my personal experience of pain. Both are forms of suffering that can be light or extreme. And it is obvious that some forms of sickness are much less tormenting than some forms of persecution.

And yet God is not... God is too good to let you have any kind of sickness, but not necessarily too good to let you go through persecution. It is my contention, and I believe it is the Bible's teaching, that all forms of suffering, whether it comes through persecution or whether it comes through sickness or through any other grief that comes from living in a fallen world, all of these things are what the Bible calls trials. And James tells us in James chapter 1 that we should count it all joy when you fall into diverse trials.

Diverse means various kinds. There is more than one kind of trial. Now in the King James it says, count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into diverse temptations.

Don't worry about that difference. The word in the Greek can be translated temptations or tests or trials. And so in the modern version, I believe you'll find it usually to say trials.

It's James 1, 2, my brethren, count it all joy, not partly joy, but all joy, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience, but let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. Now trials work patience, and patience works character, Paul said in Romans chapter 5, verses 2 and 3. And James agrees with that. Now I was once talking to a Word of Faith person, and I brought this up.

He said God never tells us to rejoice in sickness, but only to seek healing. Well, first of all, I don't know anywhere in the Bible that tells me to seek healing, except for maybe one passage. I can think of one passage.

Maybe there's more. I'm not sure. It certainly cannot be said to be a dominant theme of scripture.

I can think of one place, maybe, and that's also in James, where it says, if any sick let him call for the elders of the church, obviously for the purpose of being prayed for, and apparently in hopes of being healed. So we might well say there is a place in the same book as this, that tells us that seeking healing is a legitimate thing, at least in some circumstances. But the same book that tells us that tells us to rejoice in trials.

Now of course the question becomes, is James talking about trials that would include, say, sickness? This friend of mine I was talking to said trials have to do with persecution. Well, I will have to agree that trials, I mean, persecution can be trial. But James said, count it all joy when you fall into various trials.

And he does not specify one distinct category of trials. There are various kinds of trials. The question then is, is sickness ever called a trial in scripture? Well, it is.

As a matter of fact, the same Greek word, trial, is used by Paul of his sickness in Galatians. Now many people, of course, Word of Faith people, would not say that Paul was sick. And the ones who are pressed into the corner and have to admit that he was sick say, well, if he knew these principles he wouldn't have been.

And that is actually said by some Word of Faith teachers, that Jesus and Paul, you know, they were poorer than they needed to be, and maybe Paul had some sicknesses he didn't need to have, if only Jesus and Paul had understood these principles that they understand. Believe me, I am not joking. There have been Word of Faith people who have said that, the preachers have said those kind of things.

But mostly they just deny that Paul was sick. If I mention that Paul had sickness, most people think I am talking about 2 Corinthians 12, where he talked about the thorn in his flesh. And great pains are gone to by Word of Faith people, although they shouldn't have any pain, but they go to great pains to show that Paul's thorn in the flesh was not a sickness, it was persecution.

That the thorn in the flesh was some evil man, a messenger of Satan, as Paul refers to it, buffeting him, and it is not to be regarded as sickness. Why? Because they don't believe sickness is normative. And it is very clear in 2 Corinthians 12, that when Paul says, I prayed three times that this thorn in the flesh should be taken from me, God says, no, my grace is sufficient for you.

That will be enough. You don't need me to take this thorn away from you. You can have the thorn and my grace and that will be sufficient.

That's apparently, Paul, by the way, satisfied himself with this answer, too. He said, therefore I'll rejoice in my affirmatives. For when I'm weak, I'm strong.

So Paul said that whatever his thorn was, he had asked God to take it away, but God had revealed to him it was not really in the purpose of God to take it away, but rather to give him adequate grace for it. And Paul accepted that and apparently did not seek to get rid of his thorn anymore. Or if he did, he didn't at the time that he was writing this book.

He might at a later time in his life, we don't know. But you see, there is some question as to what Paul's thorn was, and I cannot prove beyond a shadow of doubt that Paul was sick from 2 Corinthians 12, although I think we can prove it beyond a shadow of reasonable doubt in a moment. I'm not talking about 2 Corinthians 12 or Paul's thorn, however.

I'm talking about Galatians 4. Paul is recalling to his readers how he had come among them and how they had received him early in his visit with them. He says in Galatians 4,

you know that because of physical infirmity, I preach the gospel to you at first, and my trial, he's talking about his physical infirmity, the trial, same Greek word as James uses in James 1, 2. My trial, which was in my flesh, you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. He goes on to say in verse 15, what then was the blessing you enjoyed? For I bear you witness that if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me.

Now, that statement of Paul's and a few other scriptures have given some people the hint that Paul might have had a problem with his eyes. It's hard to know what would be the advantage of anyone plucking out their eyes and giving them to Paul. I mean, he wasn't opening an eye bank.

If his eyes were adequate, there'd be no reason to even bring the suggestion up. You know, if you could, you would have given them to me your own eyes. So, there is some suggestion here, maybe not as clear as we could wish, that his problem may have been a problem with the eyes.

But whether it was that or not, we can say this, he speaks of his own physical infirmity and he speaks of it as a trial in his flesh, as a trial in his body. Now, if we are told to rejoice, count it all joy when we fall into the reverse trials, one of those kinds of trials is physical infirmity, then indeed we are told in scripture to rejoice even in sickness. Now, I'd like to point out something else of interest here because Paul refers to his condition as a physical infirmity.

If you will turn to 2 Corinthians 12 where he spoke of the thorn in his flesh, I'd like to find, show you that this word appears again. 2 Corinthians 12, 7 and following, Paul says, And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing, I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

He should have just confessed that it wasn't there, I'd say. But instead he talked to God about it. And he said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, most gladly I will rather boast of my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in needs. Poverty then? Infirmities and needs? In persecutions.

Well, that's in the list too. That's one of those kinds of trials. In distresses, for Christ's sake.

For when I'm weak, then I'm strong. Now, Paul twice in this passage suggests that the thorn in his flesh is what he calls an infirmity. Because when God said, I'm not taking the

thorn away, I'm giving you something instead.

It's called my grace. That'll be sufficient for you. Paul says, Okay then, verse 9, I will gladly boast in my infirmities rather than try to get rid of them.

I'll take pleasure in infirmities. Isn't that agreeable with James saying, count it all joy, my brother? When you fall into diverse trials, infirmity is a trial. He used those terms interchangeably in Galatians 4. We saw a moment ago, Galatians 4, 13 and 14, he said, the infirmity in my flesh, the trial that was in my flesh.

Physical infirmity. So we can see that James tells us to rejoice in various kinds of trials. Paul identifies physical infirmity as a kind of a trial.

And he even refers to it here as identifying what his thorn in the flesh was. Now, what's interesting about this is that back in Matthew chapter 8 and verse 17, we have, as we saw in our last lecture, a quotation from Isaiah 53. I read these verses to you yesterday, but let's look at them again.

Matthew 8, 16 and 17, when evening had come, they brought to Jesus many who were demon possessed and he cast out the spirits with the word and healed all who were sick, that it might be fulfilled, which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying, he himself took our infirmities. Same word as we found in 2nd Corinthians and in Galatians, and bore our sicknesses. Now we were considering yesterday whether that statement in Isaiah here that's quoted by Matthew, whether that statement is saying that Jesus took on the cross or on the whipping post vicariously our sicknesses so that we don't have to bear them as he did our sins.

I suggested from the context of this quote in Matthew that it's not talking about the atonement, it's talking about individual acts of healing are the fulfillment of that prediction. And I think we have further confirmation of that being the case from the very fact that although the apostles understood that Jesus took our infirmities, it did not mean that we don't have to bear them too. In fact, we might have to take pleasure in them and rejoice in them and count them all joy and embrace them because it's the same word.

If Jesus took my infirmities and took them means I don't have to take them. Then why did Paul rejoice in his infirmities instead of fighting it and confessing he didn't have it and all that kind of stuff? Apparently Paul was entirely unacquainted with word of faith theology. And had he become acquainted with it, I'm quite sure he would have refuted it.

So would have James. Now neither Paul nor James had any aversion to healing. James tells us if a sick person calls for the others in the church, they should pray for him and the prayer faith shall save the sick and the Lord shall raise him up.

He said, confess your faults one to another that you may be healed. James said that in James five, but Paul, of course we know is very active in healing. So what do we get from

this? We from this scriptural data, we have to conclude the following that God heals, but God doesn't always heal.

The apostles knew nothing of confessing themselves healed when they were in fact sick. When Paul found himself afflicted with a physical infirmity, he did not confess himself well. He rather prayed.

He asked God to take the infirmity away. He prayed for healing, but even he did not receive healing apparently or relief at least not instantly. We don't know whether at some later time in his life after he wrote second Corinthians, maybe someday he found himself free from that, but we don't have any evidence that this is the case.

So what we have to say is that Paul, A, did not teach that you confess your healing when you're really sick or practice it himself. B, he did not even indicate by his teaching that if you pray for healing, you'll always get it because he prayed for it and God said, no, I got another plan in your case. He said, okay, fine with me.

In others, we should be content at times without being healed and we should even count it all joy when we are tried in this way. This is a general teaching of scripture about sufferings of all kinds. And Paul, of course, never did confess anyone to be well when they were sick.

Paul frequently referred to people who were sick. He said in first Corinthians 11 that there were many in the church who were sick and some had died. He said, many are weak and sick among you.

Well, wait a minute. Jesus bore our weaknesses. But here we have in the Corinthian church, persons who are sick and weak and some have even died, says first Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 30.

Now Paul doesn't say that they are experiencing these things because of a failure to have faith. They are experiencing these things because of their desecration of the Lord's table and their, uh, the judgment from God that is upon them because of it. Likewise, Paul in second Timothy tells us that he left his friend Trophimus sick in Miletum.

In other words, the guy is sick. Paul called it sick. He didn't call it something else.

He was, uh, he doesn't show any discomfort saying it. He doesn't act as if, okay, now how am I going to explain this to you guys? I left him sick, but really, you know, uh, sickness, it's not really supposed to happen to people like us. And if it does happen, we're not supposed to have it any longer.

And I feel real embarrassed about this, but I just have to tell you, I don't know what to say, but he seems sick, you know, he just quite naturally, just as naturally as you might say to someone else, I'm sick. My mother's sick. My father's sick.

Paul said, Trophimus is sick. He didn't act like that was unusual. He didn't act like that was something that had to be explained in light of general Christian understandings about such things.

He acted as if sickness was a common thing that he didn't, everyone knew what it meant. The guy's sick. You don't need to explain it.

It's an obvious and common phenomenon. People get sick, including Christians. Now, before we can understand healing and sometimes, uh, maybe even part of the reason why sometimes people don't get healed and other people do, we need to understand where sickness comes from.

The word of faith teaching is that sickness is always from the devil and God is not in it. However, the Bible is, speaks contrary to that. There are some cases at least where the Bible indicates that God causes sickness.

That God is the one who inflicts sickness, not necessarily always on bad guys. We have this story, for example, in Genesis chapter, what is it? Chapter 32, where Jacob, who was not a bad guy. He was kind of a little carnal, but he was one of God.

He was God's man. He was a believer, at least no one can deny that. But Jacob and a man wrestled all night.

Well, all, everyone who reads the story carefully knows that that man was a, uh, was God coming to him in a human form and wrestling with him. This is in the closing verses of Genesis 32. And before the wrestling match was over, that man, it says in verse 25, touched the socket of Jacob's hip and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as he wrestled with him.

And we read, uh, later in verse 31, just as he crossed over Penuel, the sun rose on him and he was limping on his hip. The guy was, was made lame. By what? By who? Not the devil.

But by God, a direct touch of God rendered this man lame. When Moses stood at the burning bush in Exodus chapter three and four, one of the excuses he gave that he could not be the right choice of a spokesman to go and confront Pharaoh was that he was slow of speech and God gave more than one part to his answer to Moses on this. He didn't accept this as an excuse, but he, he didn't say, well, brother, confess your, confess your well, confess your articulate.

Don't confess that you're slow of speech. No, what God said to him is Exodus 411. Check this out.

It's a very good verse. If you talk to word of faith people, Exodus 411 says, so the Lord said to him, who has made man's mouth or who makes the mute and the deaf, seeing or

the blind have not I, the Lord. He didn't say the devil makes people blind or mute or deaf.

The Lord does that. People are born with infirmities. People are born with handicaps, with disabilities at times.

And this is, God is not ashamed to take responsibility for this. It is from God in Exodus chapter 15. Uh, we saw last time God's statement to the Jews at the end of a X is 1526 where he said, if you keep all my statutes and covenant and commandments, so forth, he says, I will put none of these diseases on you, which I brought on the Egyptians.

And I said yesterday, I'm not so convinced that it's referring to physical sicknesses on individuals. I think it has a lot to do with the plagues he brought on Egypt and, and his deliverance of the Jews. And it's a different kind of reference, but, but, uh, suppose we accept as, as certainly the word of faith people do that.

He is referring to diseases. I will put none of these diseases on you. Does this not imply that if you don't meet these conditions, I will put these diseases on you.

Doesn't this indicate that God is the one he indicates he has put, he's brought these diseases on the Egyptians. He didn't say the devil did. He said he brought those diseases on the Egyptians.

He said, furthermore, the implication is if you don't keep my covenant, I'll put them on you too. If you do keep my covenant, I won't put them on you. Certainly this strong implication is, and the direct statement also is that God does put disease on people or at least whatever he's referring to.

Maybe it's just the plagues of Egypt, but the point is it's, uh, it certainly is uncomfortable. It's certainly unpleasant. It's certainly negative experience for the people involved.

And a moment ago, I drew your attention to first Corinthians 1130, where Paul said, for this reason, many are weak and sick among you and many sleep. Well, who's made them sick and weak? Has the devil? No. Paul goes on in the next verse to say, for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

Now what he means is we don't have to have this sickness and weakness and death in the church. If we would just judge ourselves, we wouldn't come under this judgment. But he says, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord.

Now the judgment he's referring to is the chastening the church was currently facing in the form of the loss of certain members to sickness, weakness, and death. This was a chastening of the church by the Lord. So that why? So the church would not be ultimately condemned of the world.

Yeah, the Bible does say that God is the author of sickness at times. This, I mean, this is blasphemy in the mind of the word of faith people, but I guess that makes God himself a blasphemer against himself because he's the one who says it. And so does Paul.

And we have to go along with him too, unless we're going to throw him out of the Bible, in which case, what can we have in our Bible? He wrote more of the New Testament than anyone else. More books anyway. Now, I want to say something else.

There is an indicator that the devil plays a role in sickness. And that indicator comes from the book of Job primarily, or at least initially we have other indicators in the New Testament that sickness can be a demonically or devilishly inflicted condition. In Job, for example, chapter two, it says, Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.

So Satan did this. Satan inflicted Job with painful boils. Now this, of course, would give some fuel to the word of faith teaching that sickness is from the devil.

However, to find an instance where we read of the devil's involvement does not mean that all sickness is the devil and none of it's ever from God. As a matter of fact, Job's sickness even was from God. Satan brought it, but God sent it.

That is clear. Anyone who reads chapters one and two of Job can see it, that God was the one who made the decision whether Job should suffer or not. The devil complained that he had no power to do anything to Job.

There's a hedge around him. Only God could decide whether Job would be sick or well, and God allowed him to be sick and sent Satan off with permission. So that when his wife in chapter two, verse nine said to him, do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die.

Job's response to her in verse 10 was, you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God and shall we not accept adversity, implying from God also? And in all this, Job did not sin with his lips. In other words, Job was right.

Later at the end of the book of Job, it says God was angry at Job's counselors because they didn't speak rightly of God as Job did. Now, Job was right. He did not sin with his lips.

He did not speak falsely against God. Now, someone might say, wait a minute, he said here, shall we not accept good from God and shall we not accept adversity? He doesn't say the adversity is from God, but if you look at the previous chapter, we know that this was his meaning because at the end of chapter one, when his earlier trials came upon him, including poverty, by the way, in Job 121, he said, naked I came from my mother's womb, that is in poverty without owning anything, and naked I shall return there. I'm going to die poor.

That's a negative confession. By the way, it didn't come true because he ended up getting richer than ever before, but he made a very negative confession by word of faith standards I'm going to die poor, he said, which of course didn't come true, which in itself proves that you don't get what you say. You get what God gives you.

You can say what you want, but you can be wrong in what you say, but God will still give you what he's going to give you. He gave Job prosperity in his latter end, but Job confessed that he would die poor. Then he said the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Now, notice here, Job saw that the blessings he had received were from God, but also the adversity, the taking away was also from God. It is implied also in chapter two, verse 10, but not stated as clearly there is here.

It's the Lord who gave and it's the Lord who took away his possessions, his health, whatever. He knew that God was the one who had been good to him and God was the one that was playing hardball with him too. It was God who had brought his afflictions or given, sent them.

Now, some of you might say, well, wait, this is just to record what Job said. We know different. He was wrong.

The Lord didn't take these things away. The devil did. The Bible specifically says the devil did this.

However, it says in Job 1, 22, in all this, Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong. Now, when he says God took it away, he didn't charge God with wrong. We're not blaming God as if he's done something wrong.

If you say, God, it has allowed you to be sick, it may be God's will for me to be sick. You're not blaming God. This, Kenneth Hagin has a book called Don't Blame God.

And he basically says, it's not God who does this. It's the devil. And if you say God's will is for me to be sick, then you're blaming God.

No, Job said, God, it's God's will that I lost all this stuff. God took it away, but he didn't charge God with wrong to say that God is that I'm in God's will in my suffering. He's not charging God with wrong.

That's not blaming him. It's affirming and acknowledging his sovereignty and his right to do what he wishes. It's rejoicing in the fact that my circumstances have not come upon me by just bad luck, but they've come to me like the cup that my father has given me, Jesus said.

It's a hard cup to drink. It's a cup that Jesus actually prayed that it would not be given to

him, but would pass from him. But the father gave him the cup anyway, and he drank it and accepted it as from the father.

And it's a lot easier to drink a bitter cup if you know it is from your father, because you know your father is on your side and wiser than you. And though you might prefer to have something else, he knows what you need. There's a song on an early Phil Kage album.

I think it's on his Love Broke Through album. I don't, didn't have very many albums before that one, but I don't even know if it's still available. But as I understand it, he got the lyrics off a wall there.

He saw them written on a wall. I believe it was in the bathroom of a Christian camp, some graffiti that was up there. And I don't think he knew who wrote it, but he put it to music, and it was called Disappointment, His Appointment.

Some of you may have either heard that song or might be acquainted with the little poem that he got it from, from some other source. I can't quote it all, but it's a powerful, powerful song if you're not a Word of Faith person, because it states biblical theology very, very well. I can recite some of it.

It says, Disappointment, His Appointment. Change one letter, then I see that the thwarting of my purpose is God's better choice for me. Disappointment, His Appointment.

I'm not doing these in correct order. No good thing will he withhold from denials. Oft we gather treasures of his love untold.

He knows each broken purpose leads to fuller, deeper trust, and the end of all his dealings proves our God is wise and just. There's more. It ends with a resignation.

It says, let's see, Disappointment, His Appointment. Lord, I take it then as such, like the clay in the hands of the potter, fully yielding to your touch, all my life's plan is your molding, not one single choice be mine, let me answer unrepining, not my will, O God, but thine, or something like that. But it's a powerful and genuinely theologically sound little poem that our disappointments are not just bad luck, they are his appointments, and what a difference it makes to receive suffering as from a faithful creator, as Peter says in 1 Peter 4, 19, where he almost certainly is talking about persecution and not healing in that case, or not sickness, but he says, therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing as unto a faithful creator.

1 Peter 4, 19. Anyway, what I'm saying is, yes, we do find in the scripture, the devil is instrumental in bringing sickness and other forms of suffering on people. We find that an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul and tormented him when he was in rebellion

against God.

In the New Testament, we find certain people afflicted with demons whose condition was seen in physical symptoms, bent over and unable to stand up. In the case of a woman, I think it was Luke 13, if I'm not mistaken, a woman who for 12 years had not been able to stand up. She had a spirit of infirmity, and Jesus, he said she had been bound by Satan all this time.

He described her conditions, bound by Satan. She couldn't stand up. He set her free and she was able to stand up.

Other people had mute and deaf spirits or epileptic spirits and they were cast out and the persons were healed. It's obvious in such cases that the devil was instrumental and the demons were instrumental in bringing about these physical conditions. But it's also that fact, that acknowledgement does not rule out any possibility that God also was in it.

We don't know why people become demonized. We don't know why the devil is given assistance in hurting people. But Paul said of a case of church discipline, turn that man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus.

Remember when Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, though our outward man perish, the inward man is renewed day by day. The inward man is what matters most. God may allow the outward man in order to accomplish something in the inner man.

That verse is of course 2 Corinthians 4, 16. For though our outer man perish, our inward man is renewed day by day. God may allow the outward man to be decaying and decomposing in infirmity and rotting and perishing, but that's okay because all the while, every day, we're getting better inside, at least possibly, potentially.

We talked about that in our other series, Making Sense Out of Suffering. But when Paul said you deliver that man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit might be saved in the day of Christ Jesus, that's in 1 Corinthians 5. He gives those instructions. And he says also in 1 Timothy that he had done just that with certain persons also, Alexander and another heretic, in the closing words actually of 1 Timothy 1, he says, he names in verse 20, Hymenaeus and Alexander whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Well, it's in 1 Corinthians 5, he says you deliver them over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh. Now, what's that mean? It means that you give Satan free reign to hurt them in their body. I do not deny that sickness can be instigated by the devil, although I think a lot of it's instigated just by germs.

There is no biblical teaching that all sickness in every case comes directly from the devil. We have specific cases. Remember when we were talking about hearing from God, I

mentioned that based on biblical accounts, one could almost conclude that every dream that a person has is a prophecy from God because virtually the Bible only records such dreams as were prophecies of God.

But of course we know that not every dream is a prophecy from God, we just know that exceptional dreams which are, have been recorded as such in Scripture. Likewise, if we read of Satan causing a sickness here and causing an affliction here, that does not in itself argue that all sicknesses are caused by Satan or by his direct influence. It may be that these are the exceptional cases where Satan is particularly involved.

There are far more sicknesses that occurred in Israel during the years that the Bible history covers than those that are recorded. And very likely many of the sicknesses, like the one from which Elisha died, by the way, Elisha who did twice as many miracles as Elijah and even raised the dead himself, Elisha died sick according to 2 Kings chapter 13, he died of a sickness. The apostle Paul had a thorn in his flesh which was some kind of infirmity, he said.

He didn't get out of that as far as we know either. We have to say, although notice, he said his thorn in the flesh was a messenger from Satan. Okay? This is an interesting point, because God wanted him to have it, because when he asked God to take it away, which God certainly was capable of doing, God says, no, my grace is sufficient.

Now God could have taken away the messenger of Satan, but he didn't choose to. Why? Paul said that messenger of Satan was sent to him so that it would prevent him from being exalted above measure. God had a use for him being infirm, a spiritual benefit that he could derive from it, and therefore he allowed a messenger from Satan to buffet him.

An evil spirit from God came against Saul. Certainly Job's afflictions carried in the hands of the devil to Job were sent by the decree of Job's loving and sympathetic God, who had better plans for his life. Job himself said, when he has tried me, meaning God has tried me, his trials, I shall come forth as gold.

He knew that there was some benefit to be had from it. By the way, Job is one of the biggest thorns in the side of the Word of Faith movement, because the Word of Faith movement indicates that if you are sick or poor, then you are deficient in some spiritual thing, particularly in faith, or maybe you've sinned. But if you're sick or poor, you are not in God's will, and it's your fault, because God doesn't want you sick or poor.

And yet we find Job both sick and poor. All his possessions are stolen from him, and his health is taken from him. He's sick and he's poor.

Yet he attributes it to God's hand, and he rejoices in it, and God indicates that Job's doing the right thing. Now, you see, the Word of Faith people, in order to get around the problem of Job, they've done something very ingenious. They've said, you know, in Job

3.25, Job accidentally tips his hand and lets us see why these things happened to him.

Why did these things happen to Job? Well, Job says in Job 3.25, the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me. They say, see there? Fear? That's not faith. Job, before these things happened to him, he did not have faith.

He had fear. He feared and dreaded, and therefore his lack of faith is what made him vulnerable to these things, just as the same today. So, in other words, Job's trials came because of his lack of faith, because of his fear.

Now, let me just say before I refute that decisively, that the verse itself cannot be proven to mean that. For him to say, the thing I feared came upon me, does not mean that it is his fear that brought it upon him. That may be true if it were arguable from other texts, but that text itself certainly doesn't say that.

To say what happened to me is exactly what I feared would happen. It does not mean there was a cause and effect relationship between the fear and the event, and you would have to take it from other grounds. Well, in Job chapter 2, the Word of Faith people point this out.

In Job 2, verse 4, Satan answered the Lord and said, skin for skin, yes, all that a man has he will give for his life, but stretch out your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse you to your face. So the Lord said to Satan, behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life. Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job.

Now, notice that interchange between Satan and God. According to the Word of Faith people, God didn't give permission, but he simply said to Satan, behold, he is in your hand, just spare his life. Now, what the Word of Faith people say about this is that because Job had fear in his life and not faith, even God couldn't protect him from the devil.

He was in Satan's hand. God is just acknowledging this. Sadly, he wishes it wasn't true, but because of Job's lack of faith, because of his fear, he is in the hands of the devil, and God himself can't protect him, is how they understand this.

But would you notice that Satan himself acknowledged that it must be God who will stretch out his hand to touch his bone and his flesh? Also, I would point out that earlier in chapter 1, verse 8, God said to Satan, have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil. Now, Job is blameless. There's nothing for which he can be blamed, in other words, at this point.

And Satan answered the Lord and said, does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge around him, around his household and around all that he has on every

side? You have blessed the work of his hands and the possessions have increased in the land. Now, all of this was what? When he had fear in his heart? God had blessed him. He was rich.

He was healthy. And what's more, it says there was a hedge around him. This is a complaint Job has.

I can't touch him. No wonder. No wonder he's a good man.

You don't let me afflict him. You put a hedge around him. All this while Job was in fear? How could there be a hedge around Job and at the same time, he's in Satan's hand because of his own fear and lack of faith? The Bible does not say that Job's fear of the things which came upon him was in any sense a cause of his sufferings, nor does it indicate that God held it against him that he had such fears.

As a matter of fact, in God's sight, he was blameless. You cannot get around it. God himself makes that statement.

He's a blameless man. You can't lay anything to his charge. He had a hedge around him and there was no blame that could be laid to him.

So he was not in Satan's hand by some personal defect in his faith. Furthermore, if you'd notice in verse 3 of chapter 2, after Satan had brought the first wave of trials on Job and Satan comes back to get more permission to do more, in Job 2 and verse 3, God said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on earth, a blameless and upright man? Now this is the same interview where he said, He's in your hand. It's clear that by saying he's in your hand, it doesn't mean Job has done something terribly wrong to put himself under Satan's power and therefore even God can't help him.

God is still saying he's a blameless man. There's no charge to be laid against Job. There's nothing wrong with him.

He's a blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil and still he holds fast to his integrity. Notice, although you incited me against him to destroy him without cause. Now this is God's pronouncement.

What caused Job to be afflicted? God says that he, by the way, was incited by the devil to afflict Job. So God himself indicates that he's the afflictor of Job. But he says it was without cause.

Now that doesn't mean that God had no purpose in it whatsoever, but it means that there was no explicable cause. There's no cause and effect relationship between anything that's happening with Job and the things that happened to him. His sufferings came upon him without cause.

Not because of his fear, not because of his lack of faith, but without cause, God said. There is absolutely no way a person can do justice to these passages and say that Job suffered because of a defect in his faith. He suffered because God and the devil had a bet on him.

He was a good man, blameless as far as God was concerned. There was no cause to afflict him, but God and the devil decided to have a contest and see if a man will serve God under affliction and remain his integrity or not. And Job, therefore, suffered for reasons that Job may never have understood.

Do you understand why? It's because suffering may be the price that a man has to pay in order to achieve some higher purpose that God has. In this case, to vindicate the cause of the righteous in general and to demonstrate that Satan was wrong in thinking that man serves God only because God protects him from suffering. What this contest proved to all onlookers, including the devil himself, was that godly men serve God because God is innately worthy and lovable and faithful.

And there is indeed loyalty to God that transcends a fawning after God to get his blessings. What was demonstrated in the story of Job was that God is lovable for himself, not only for his benefits and his blessings. And here's a man whose life proves it, that God can be trusted even when he's withholding the blessings and taking them away.

That proved it. God gained from this experience, and so did Job, because he was made twice as rich at the end. Everyone gained except the devil in this.

There was a higher purpose in God allowing this all to happen, but it had nothing to do with Job himself. That is to say, nothing to do with anything he did wrong. He was not being punished.

He was not bringing upon himself these problems by a defective faith. Any suggestion to the contrary is a desperate attempt to sandwich or to shoehorn a book that screams out against the word of faith teaching into a word of faith paradigm. It does not fit.

It will not work. But we do acknowledge that Satan can be instrumental some of the time, maybe all the time, I don't know, in some sickness, but only as God allows. Still, even when a man's sickness comes from through the devil, as Job's did, he still says, the Lord gave and the Lord took away and was right in saying so.

So we can say sickness is from God. It may come through Satan. Now, you might say, does that mean if it's from God, I guess I can never be healed.

Why would God ever heal if he is the one who gave the sickness? Well, didn't you read, turn the man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit might be saved? In the day of Christ Jesus, sufferings are remedial. Sufferings are instructional. Sufferings are corrective.

And there are times at least when the sufferings may be permitted by God because there is something he's trying to work out. Maybe he's trying to get us to repent. Maybe he's trying to get us to learn a lesson.

Maybe he's trying to get us to trust him in the dark. Maybe he's trying to work patience into us, but whatever he's seeking to do, that suffering may well outlive its purpose. It may accomplish its purpose and be no longer needed, at which time it is not surprising that God might heal.

Now, there are other reasons to heal too. Most of the healings in the Bible, this is an interesting point you may have never noticed, virtually all of the healings in the Bible were worked upon people who were not Christians per se. Now, there were some people who were healed through their faith.

Let me clarify that. You've got the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus said, your faith has made you well.

You've got the man whom Paul saw had the faith to be healed and got healed. Obviously, these people had some faith. But the majority of healings that Jesus did were worked on people who never ended up being his followers.

He'd go to town and heal everyone in town. And most of those people would not become permanent followers of his. His healings in many cases were upon unblessed people.

We need to realize that one of the purposes in healing was, and probably still is, is to confirm the word to unbelievers. In other words, healings are among those things that are signs to confirm the word to unbelievers. We know this because Mark writes this in those disputed verses at the end of his book.

Disputed because they're not found in all manuscripts, but there are good reasons to accept them as authentic, since they're quoted in early church fathers whose writings predate the earliest manuscripts of Mark that we have. But anyway, most scholars just throw them out because they're not supported in the Alexandrian text. But Jesus said this in Mark 16, in verse 15 and following, he said to them, go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.

He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe. In my name they will cast out demons.

They will speak with new tongues. They will take up serpents. And if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them.

They will lay hands on the sick and they will recover. Now, I'm not saying none of these benefits would accrue to a Christian himself, but these are said to be signs. Signs for

what purpose? We'll look at two verses later in verse 20.

And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. What signs? What was he just mentioned? Jesus worked with the apostles, confirming their message to the unbelievers who needed to be convinced of it by these signs. Now, Jesus said a wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign to be seeking after signs all the time is not a mark of faith.

It's certainly not a mark of godliness. It's if anything, Jesus indicated that's a mark of being part of a wicked and adulterous generation. That doesn't mean we don't want God to provide signs for people who are wicked and adulterous and who need those signs, but it means that we're not obsessed with them.

We're not fascinated with just seeing dazzling works on Marvel Studios to bolster our faith. We already believe the signs are for those who do not believe. Now he said, these are some of the signs that will follow the preaching of the gospel in Mark 16, 17.

You've got the casting out demons. You've got speaking with new tongues. You know, it's interesting.

The apostle Paul said in first Corinthians 14, he said, tongues is a sign. What? Not for those who believe, but for those who believe not. I don't want to oversimplify a complex topic and tongues is a complex topic because there's more than one use of tongues acknowledged in scripture.

There is an edifying, self-edifying use of tongues, a devotional use. There's also a body edifying use, edifying the body of Christ with tongues and interpretation. These things are acknowledged, but there is also this statement when tongues is a sign and in Mark 16, it's a sign.

These signs shall follow. They shall speak with new tongues. Well, when tongues is a sign, it is not a sign for believers.

It is a sign for unbelievers. He says that in first Corinthians 14, 22, first Corinthians 14, 22, therefore tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to those who are unbelievers. Now, Jesus said, these signs will follow the preaching of the gospel.

Those who believe and who preach the gospel will be accompanied by signs, confirming the word. We see this fulfilled in verse 20 of the same chapter. And these signs will include speaking in tongues, casting out demons, taking up serpents.

You know, we only have one instance in the Bible recorded of any believer taking up a serpent and that was Paul on the Island of Malta. And what happened then? Do you remember what was the result of him taking up a serpent? The unbelievers became

convinced that he was a God. They thought he was a God, but actually he set him straight on that.

But it was a sign to the unbelievers. Paul was bitten by a venomous snake, which should have killed him. And it didn't have any ill effect on him.

He shook it off in the fire and the unbelievers watching on were amazed. And it convinced them that this man was, you know, the man to listen to, the man to pay attention to. And he later healed also the father of the ruler of the Island.

Now they shall lay their hands on the sick and they shall recover. Now, what I'm saying here is that Jesus identifies a ministry of healing at the hands of the church as among those things that are signs to the unbeliever. Why would God heal if he in fact has an afflicted? Maybe he is afflicted so that he might heal.

It is possible that God might afflict somebody or allow, at least allow the devil to afflict them when he could have prevented it. He might allow them to be afflicted so that he could be glorified and make his word confirmed by later healing. He couldn't heal him if there were no diseases and he could allow the devil to run rampant in a society or germs or disease or plagues to run rampant in a society so that when he heals, which the disease of course gives him opportunity to do, he confirms his word.

You know, it says in Hosea 6, and this is speaking figuratively, not of actual literal disease, but consider the implications here. Hosea 6, 1, Come and let us return to the Lord for he has torn, but he will heal us. He has stricken, but he will bind us up.

Okay. This is of course talking about how God has treated the nation. It's not talking about individual sickness, but it is using the motif of sickness and so forth.

And it certainly shows that it's not outside of God's character to afflict so that he can bind up, that he can strike, he can tear so that he can heal. If someone thinks that this makes God capricious, I dare say that person doesn't have enough of the fear of God and needs a little more, maybe a lot more, because God is the one who does what he wills to do and always for the good of his people. If he allows you to be sick, it'll be for your good.

If he heals you, that too will be for your good. He will do whatever is for your good, but more importantly, what is for the glory of his kingdom and for the good of all. You know, your sickness may be something God uses for someone else's benefit, not yours.

Now, I personally think Johnny Erickson-Totta in her handicap has benefited spiritually. She would testify the same thing. But how many others have benefited from her sickness as well? How many others have learned spiritual lessons and been comforted and been strengthened in their times of trial by her testimony and her sickness? You know, your sickness may well be something that God uses so that he will confirm his word by your

healing later on.

Or it may be something he will use to strengthen other believers. Remember Paul said about his imprisonment, a different kind of suffering, but still a similar principle. He says in Philippians chapter one, the things that have happened to me being imprisoned here in Rome work out for the furtherance of the gospel.

The other believers are made more bold to preach when they know of my change. When you know of the faithfulness of a suffering Christian, it encourages you to jump on board and do the same. And who knows how many people may be strengthened in their time of trial and suffering by having seen you in yours and seen your response to it, and your trusting God and your grace upon you.

This is not to be ruled out at all. I can't say that I know why God allows any particular instance of suffering and sickness, but I can say this, God doesn't waste anything. God is a good economist.

You remember when Jesus fed the multitudes and everyone was full, there was more than enough food. Jesus said, gather up the fragments that nothing be wasted, nothing be lost. Well, why? Who cares? Feed it to the birds for crying out loud.

Everyone's full. They're not going to be eating again for hours. And after all, if they did, you could just take a little crust and multiply it some more.

Why go to the pains of gathering up all these fragments? Well, just because God's an economist, he doesn't like waste, I think. He doesn't like to waste things. And God doesn't waste your sorrows.

You might, but God doesn't intend to. If you are suffering at the hand of God, he intends a benefit that would outweigh, if put in the scales against the suffering, would outweigh it. Paul said, I'm convinced that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

Romans 8, 18. The sufferings of this present time aren't worthy to be compared. If you put them in the scales, the glory and the benefit that God intends far outweighs the suffering.

Paul said in another place, our light affliction, which is but for a moment works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Again, the afflictions are light, the glory is weighty. The benefit is heavier.

God is a great economist. He invests well, and it costs him something for you to suffer. It costs him.

In the Psalms, it's talking about when God, no, it's in Isaiah, I'm afraid. I don't remember

now the passage, either Psalms or Isaiah. It's talking about when the children of Israel were in the wilderness and it says of God and of them, in all their affliction, he was afflicted.

Do you remember seeing that verse somewhere? Maybe someone can tell me where that is. It's either in Psalm or Isaiah. If it's somewhere else, I stand humbled.

I'm pretty sure it's either in Psalm or Isaiah. I'm always surprised when I run across it because it's either in Isaiah and I thought it was in the Psalms or it's in the Psalms and I thought it was in Isaiah. I don't remember.

But it says, in all their affliction, he was afflicted. That means God cannot have his people suffer without him suffering too. Remember when Jesus said in the parable of the sheep and the goats, I was sick and you visited me? And they'll say, when did we do that? We don't remember that.

He says, inasmuch as you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me. You mean when his brethren are sick, he's sick? When they're afflicted, he's afflicted? Yes, they're his body. How can your body suffer and you don't suffer? We're of his flesh and of his bones.

God suffers when you suffer. Therefore, you can be sure he's not going to waste his sorrow. He's not going to suffer for nothing.

And you can be sure that if God allows sickness and does not heal, he's got a good reason for it. But one reason might be in some cases that he intends to glorify himself by healing supernaturally. At other times, he may just let the sickness go away in a natural way, because it's not his intention to use that as a sign.

Miracles, miracle healings are a sign. Just recovering gradually may not be so much a sign. But God has his many purposes.

I guess what I'm trying to say is the word of faith makes a mistake by putting sickness in a class all by itself that has all kinds of metaphysical significance. That if you're sick, somehow you're in a special class of suffering that is inappropriate. And then you've got to explain it.

You've got lack of faith or you're a sinner. And if the devil is not God, it becomes a terrible theological mess for them trying to explain the phenomenon of sickness. What I'm saying is the Bible doesn't treat it as that unusual.

The Bible just treats sickness as one of the many complex results of the fallen world we live in and of God's dealing with humanity too. Sickness can be a chastisement from the Lord upon a believer or on the church, as in 1 Corinthians 11 we saw. Sickness from the Lord can be a judgment as when God afflicted Gehazi with leprosy or afflicted Miriam

with leprosy.

I mean, God can afflict an evil person as a judgment. He can discipline the righteous with it or he can just bring glory to himself by allowing a righteous man like Job bear the pain of sickness and of loss and of poverty for a while faithfully with integrity so that God in the end is glorified and the man in the end is blessed greater than he was before he suffered. God doesn't have to explain himself.

Sickness is just one of the many things in his toolbox. It doesn't stand in a category by itself that needs special explanation. And of course, there's every reason to believe that much sickness is not by some special divine decree, but simply by leaving people to the circumstances that they're in.

Now, I don't believe that any trusting Christian ever is sick without the will of God. People who are not Christians, I don't know. I mean, God gives them over and lets them, you know, turns them over to Satan.

Let the devil have them for a while. I don't know that we could say that they're in the devil's hands because God turned them over, but we're not so sure that everything that happens to them while they're in the devil's hands are specifically things that God wrote out and said, devil do this, do this, do this, do this. I mean, a person who's not in God's hands, who's not a trusting Christian cannot be a hundred percent sure that every form of affliction that comes upon them is directly the will of God.

Although it may be well his will that they suffer in some form to correct them. But the believer who trusts God has no coincidences. Because if the hairs of your head are numbered and if not a sparrow falls to the ground, but by his will, then it certainly is the case that nothing so significant as you enduring pain and suffering and sickness ever occurs without his will and without his specific attention to it.

And that's why Peter says, therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God. If you are a Christian and you're suffering, you're suffering according to the will of God. Now, let me make some biblical points about sickness and healing real quickly here because we're kind of low on time.

We know of cases where it was not God's will to heal immediately and supernaturally. One very important case, I've heard word of faith people say that Jesus healed everyone who ever asked him. I don't think so.

In John chapter 11, we have a very dear friend of Jesus, sick. His name is Lazarus. He sends his sisters, or at least they come on their own, on his behalf.

Or they send a messenger saying, Lord, behold, the one that you love is sick. There's no question what they're asking there. They don't come out and say, come and heal him.

But it's clear that that's what they're implying. In fact, they're angry at Jesus a little later because he didn't come and heal him. That's what we told you.

He was sick. Why didn't you come? I mean, it's very clear that this is a request for Jesus to come and heal Lazarus. What did he do? In verse four, when Jesus heard that, he said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God.

Oh, sickness can be for the glory of God. I thought the word of faith, the teachers told me that it doesn't glorify God for you to be sick. But he says, no, this sickness is for the glory of God.

Now, someone would say, well, Steve, God wasn't glorified in the sickness. We know that Lazarus died and then was raised from the dead, and God was glorified in that. I say, okay, God's got a complex way of glorifying himself through sickness.

But it's still the case. The man died sick, and that was for the glory of God, ultimately. Who's to say that your sickness can't also be one way or another in the sovereign dealings of God can't be for his glory too.

Jesus did not heal Lazarus. He let him die. It says specifically in verse five, now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

So he wasn't being mean to them. He loved them. So when he heard that he was sick, he stayed two more days in the place where he was until the man died.

Isn't that an interesting conjunction of ideas? Jesus loved him. So he didn't come and heal him. He let him die.

And then he said to his disciples, he's dead. We're going to go down there now. Now, see, perhaps if you were a word of faith person, you might say, well, Steve, this is not, this is an unusual case.

True. Jesus didn't actually heal the man of his sickness, but he did something better. He raised him from the dead.

I say, amen. Amen. It says in first, in Hebrews chapter 11, there were people who endured all kinds of horrible things and refused deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection.

The word of faith people don't know anything about refusing deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. They act as if you're sinning. If you refuse deliverance, you're sinning as if you accept suffering as from the hand of God.

That verse, by the way, is in Hebrews chapter 11 in verse 35, others were tortured, not accepting deliverance that they might obtain a better resurrection. What if you are sick and do not demand a healing from God that you might obtain a better resurrection? In

other words, Lazarus wanted to be healed. His sisters wanted to be healed, but instead God gave him a resurrection, not a healing.

Is that fair? Well, it's certainly within God's character. He did it. He let Lazarus die.

And then he later healed him. I mean, not healed him, but raised him. What about you? Well, he may let you die and raise you up too.

He's going to raise you up in the last day and it'll be for his glory because he'll be glorified in you then. Let me turn your attention over to an important passage that sounds as if God always wants to heal the sick. Look at James 5. Of all the statements in the Bible about healing, and there are many about healing, this is the only one that I can find that looks like a promise to be laid hold of, that you will be healed if you do the right thing.

When you're sick, if you go through these motions, you will get healed. It's the only passage I can think of in the whole Bible that looks like it would translate into a generic promise for any sick person who has faith to be healed. And yet, let me read it for you.

It says, verse 14, James 5, 14, is anyone among you sick? Of course not. James shouldn't even ask that question. No one would admit it if they were.

No one's sick or healed 2,000 years ago. But James thought some might be sick. That sounds like a negative confession, but James apparently was not acquainted with the doctrine of word of faith and positive confession.

He indicates some people are sick and they should acknowledge it and call for help. For who? Let them call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up.

And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Now, what I've always understood this to mean is that if I'm sick, I'll call for the elders of the church, they'll anoint me with oil, and the Lord will raise me up. I'll get up out of bed.

I'll be healed. And the prayer of faith will save me, heal me. That's what I always thought it meant.

Now, I've been an elder in churches before, charismatic churches. And I will tell you this, I have had very, very strong faith in God and in healing. And I can remember times when we prayed for sick people and I was as sure as could be.

We anointed with oil as an eldership, and we had great faith that God was going to move and heal, and he didn't. Now, when this happens a few times, and you look at a scripture like this, you say, okay, what's wrong here? What's wrong with this picture? Either the

scripture is wrong, or there's something wrong about me and what I'm doing. Now, one way, certainly the scripture is not wrong.

No Christian believes that. So let me consider the possibility there's something wrong with me. There's two possibilities, at least, that might explain why I do what I do, and I don't get the results I expect.

One is that maybe I'm not praying the prayer of faith. It says the prayer of faith shall save the sick. In some cases, perhaps, I'm not getting the results because I'm deficient in this.

I don't have enough faith. But this can't be the explanation in every case. And I'll tell you why.

Because I have known such faith that God was going to heal that I fully expected it without a shadow of doubt in my mind, and it didn't happen. Now, you might say, well, you needed more faith still than that. Well, I must ask you this.

I must just say this. I'll make this as an affirmation, not a question. If it requires more faith than I had on certain occasions when I prayed for the sick to be well, then it requires more faith than a human being can be expected to have, because I fully, 100 percent expected healing, and it didn't happen.

You can't get any more than 100 percent. And if it takes more than that, then we're all doomed, because none of us have enough faith anyway. Might as well not make any promises about it.

Might as well not hold it out as a carrot on a stick that we can never reach. If a child can have this kind of faith, if faith is something that is childlike and does not take great exertion and does not require great contortions of the mind, but it just is trusting God, I've done that. So have many, many others, and they haven't always seen the results they expected.

Sometimes I have seen people healed by the anointing of oil. Sometimes I've seen people healed by laying on of hands. Sometimes I've seen people healed without either of those things, but by prayer alone.

I believe in supernatural healing, but what I'm saying, if you do what it says here and it doesn't happen what you thought was going to happen, either the scripture is wrong or there's something wrong with you. Now, if there's something wrong with you, and that is what I assume to be the case, one possibility, as I said, is lack of faith. But I know that was not the case in some cases.

There is another possibility, though, that could be wrong with me, and I may be misunderstanding what the verse is promising. Maybe I'm expecting results that are not

really promised. What does it say after all? I've had to go back in the last few years and look at that more carefully, because I teach through James, and I have to deal with the verse word by word and make sense of it.

He says, Is anyone sick among you? Let him call for the elders of the church. Let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. By the way, this practice, we don't know of any case in the book of Acts where anointing of oil, or in Jesus' ministry, where the anointing of oil was used to heal.

Now, I take that back. There might have been... No, I don't think so. I don't think I know of any case where anointing of oil... Maybe... No, I don't think so.

But let me see. I don't want to say something that's not true. I think there was a case.

Maybe. Let me see if Mark 6, 13 is the case. I've got a cross-reference here.

I don't want to say something that's not true, because whether I'm right or wrong about this, it's not crucial to my essential point, but I don't want to be inaccurate. Okay, there was one case, apparently. In Mark 6, in verse 13, they cast out... This is the disciples, when Jesus sent out the twelve.

It says, they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. Okay, that's not essential to my point. I'm just trying to make sure I don't say anything wrong here.

There is a case, one case, in the scripture. It says, from the twelve were sent out, they anointed with oil. We don't see that happening in the book of Acts, though, and we don't see Jesus ever doing that.

Now, it says, though, what will be the results of doing this? Well, in verse 15, it says, the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he's committed sins, he'll be forgiven. Now, notice he could have said, the prayer of faith will heal the sick, but he says, the prayer of faith shall save the sick. Now, I'm not trying... I won't make more of this than I'm entitled to.

The word save, sozo, can include healing. I mean, deliverance, salvation, healing, all of this can be included under the general word save. But it's not the most precise word for healing.

I mean, there are other words that actually mean healing, specifically. It seems to me like James could have said, the prayer of faith will heal the sick. After all, when the sick is who's being affected, heal is the word you'd expect to find.

Will heal the sick. But it says, will save the sick, which could include healing, but doesn't in itself necessarily mean healing. Then he says, and the Lord will raise him up.

I always meant that raise him up off his bed, but I later learned that this word raised up is used frequently in scripture by Jesus and the apostles. Of what? I will raise him up at the last day. I will raise him up at the last day.

I will raise him up at the last day. I will raise him up at the last day. Four times in one chapter, Jesus said that about the believer.

I will raise him up. Now, James said the prayer faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up. And if he's forgiven, if he's committed sins, he'll be forgiven and confess your sins.

So you'll be healed. Now healed here could be physical healing. You know what I think is happening here? I'll just tell you what my, my, my tentative understanding is.

And I don't think anyone can prove me wrong. I may be wrong, from the evidence I could be proven wrong about this. Um, I think what James may be saying is to the general community out there, if you're sick.

And by the way, in those days, there wasn't much in the way of medical care. If you're sick, you may be looking at death, imminent death, or you better get right with God, call for the elders of the church. They probably can't baptize you.

You're in bed sick, probably, but, but they can anoint you. Maybe that would be in place to baptize. The, the, uh, Catholic church practices, what they call extreme unction is a cult, which is anointing of people at last rights of someone who's dying or dead or almost dead.

They, they get it from this passage. So apparently they understand this way, though. I got this understanding without knowing what they thought, but apparently the idea could be if you are sick and dying, it's time you better get right with God, confess your sins, call in the elders.

So you can make a confession to them, let them anoint you as in lieu of baptism, perhaps, because you're not in any condition to be formally officially baptized. And you will then have assurance that though you are sick, you are saved. The prayer faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise him up.

Now that's sufficiently ambiguous to allow that God might heal you and raise you off your bed. Or if not, he may save you and allow you to die, but raise you up later. That's what he did with Lazarus.

Did he give Lazarus and his sisters any cause for disappointment that he didn't come and heal him and let him die? No, because he raised him up. We're all going to die of something. Dying of sickness is not particularly the worst way to die.

There are more gruesome ways, more painful ways to die. And there's no reason to believe that when it is our time to die, that God cannot use sickness to allow that. But at least there's the assurance of those who've made confession of their sins and are right with God that they are saved and God will raise them up.

I'm saying that James is not necessarily wording such things in such a way as to construe an actual promise of healing. It may be that he's leaving it open for that by using ambiguous wording, but he also leaves it open that maybe you won't be healed, maybe you'll just be saved and raised up in the last day. One way or the other, you'll be raised up if you're a Christian.

Well, there's much more on this. All I can say is that there's cases in Scripture where God did not heal instantly. Timothy, 1 Timothy 5, 23, had often infirmities of his stomach.

Paul didn't say, claim your healing, brother, confess yourself well. He said, take a little wine. That's the medicinal way to treat this.

So we can see that healing is not really something that everyone can claim. It's not like it's been purchased and we just claim it. Just go in and cash in on a contract.

Healing is an act of mercy. And if it's a mercy, it's not owed. It says in Philippians, chapter two, Paul says, talking about a friend of his name, Epaphroditus, Philippians 2, 25, verse 27, for indeed, he was sick almost unto death, but God had mercy on him.

And it was God healed him. This Christian worker was sick, almost died, but he didn't. He got well.

God had mercy on him. There's a difference between mercy and justice. If God forgives our sins, it's a matter of justice.

He's faithful and just to forgive our sins. Why? It's been purchased. It's owed.

But it's a mercy if he heals, says Paul, not a justice. It's not owed. It's not purchased.

It's God's sovereign decision to extend this particular kind of mercy or another kind in another situation. That is, I believe, the biblical view of sickness and healing. Actually, I have several more points, more scriptures to give.

We're going to have to not give them, though. I think we've made the basic point. There is healing.

God heals, but he does so at his own prerogative, by his own sovereign decision. He doesn't owe it. And if he doesn't give it, it's because he has something better in mind.

The Christian must learn to submit to the will of God, not be giving orders to God and making claims that God has not given us the proper authority to make. We can ask with

faith in God that he will do what's right and he'll heal us if it's his will, but we can also accept when it isn't, as Jesus prayed that the cup would be passed from him if it was the Father's will, but it was not the Father's will, so he had to drink the cup after all. That is the Christian's attitude toward suffering and toward sickness.