

INVITING
CHRIST
ON OUR
HEALING
JOURNEY

*A Therapist's Perspective on Incorporating
Spirituality with Mental Health*



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CHAPTER 1

The Master Healer

Jesus Christ Is the Master Healer

Mortality brings with it a wide variety of ailments. While we likely will not experience all the potential challenges that exist in this world, we are here to learn and grow, which is effectively done through overcoming difficult situations. God and Jesus Christ, in Their infinite mercy, have prepared ways for us to be supported and blessed during even the most difficult of circumstances. As we encounter these challenges, it is critical that we allow ourselves to turn to the One who wants the best for us. When we feel we have been hurt by the world or mortality, the Master Healer is ready to come to our aid and make our burden light.

Jesus Christ is the Master Healer. He demonstrated this truth throughout His mortal ministry as He went about helping people to overcome physical ailments as well as emotional, mental, and spiritual challenges. Christ has also been guiding the hands of His servants throughout history in doing the same. Likewise, there are numerous examples of miraculous healing in my own life. Some examples have come through others who are acting for Him. There has also been significant emotional and spiritual healing without others present, which clearly came from the power of Christ.

In this chapter, I aim to provide a few examples from our Savior's mortal ministry to help us see a few ways that He healed others then and how He does the same for us now.

The Woman with the Faith to Be Healed (Mark 5:25–34, Luke 8:43–48)

I have heard the story often of a woman who came to Jesus, only seeking to touch His garment. We don't know her complete story, but we do know that she had been suffering for more than a decade. Her illness caused uncontrollable blood flow, which according to the Jewish custom made her unclean. Others in the community had, out of necessity for keeping themselves clean, avoided her.

Think of the loneliness she must have experienced because of her condition. For twelve years, she struggled not only with her illness but also with the accompanying isolation. No wonder she had spent all that she had on doctors and treatments available in her day. These methods of dealing with the issue of blood were likely inhumane and could have been as difficult as the illness itself. We don't know which was more challenging to bear: the physical stress of a disease that we don't have specifics for or not being able to make meaningful connections with others because of something she couldn't control. Either way, she had numerous challenges to navigate.

The specifics of how she came to know of the ministry of Jesus Christ are not recorded in the scriptures. However, a few internal reactions seem feasible, given her circumstances. One reaction she may have experienced is exasperation over the thought of trying yet another option, which may or may not work like the others. Another possible reaction would be her rejoicing in the prospect of her Messiah coming, and for her to have a chance to find real relief. Based on the response we see from Christ Himself, it seems most plausible for the second option to have occurred.

No matter how the experience started, her desire to find the Lord and be healed led her to a multitude. In an effort to not bring attention to herself, she reached out and touched the hem of Christ's garment as He went through the crowd. If the woman hoped to sneak away without being noticed, as I imagine she wanted, her plan was quickly foiled by Christ, who always saw a grander purpose in everything. Calling attention to the situation, He inquired to know who touched Him. After a few potentially agonizing moments, the woman identified herself from the crowd, knowing full well that this could cause many problems. Acknowledging that she was the one who touched the hem of His garment, however, allowed her to find both physical and spiritual healing.

Jesus Christ's interaction with the woman brought attention to her physical healing in front of a large crowd. This would mean that others would know she was no longer unclean and would be allowed to fully interact with those around her, especially in a religious sense. She could become part of a community in a way that she desperately needed.

In an immediate sense, this woman was also able to find real interactions with her Savior. He did not shy away from her or condemn her. Instead, He praised her for her faith. He did not condemn her actions but rather expressed desire for her to feel comforted. The loneliness and guilt that the woman may have experienced in those moments were addressed right then and there, and in a way that would show her she was loved and cared for. Christ looked at her whole being and saw all her needs. He healed all those needs in that moment, in a way that she was not looking for and that she likely didn't expect. He did this because He loved her completely.

We all experience different challenges in this life. Some may bring long-term suffering as with this woman. But that was not all of her story. In reading her story, we get to know her in her darkest moment, but there was much more that I suspect was part of her story. What could she have done from that point forward that she couldn't have done before? This miracle was a confirmation of her faith, and I choose to believe that she would hold that experience dear and accomplish much good in her life.

It can be common for us to expect healing from God in specific ways, often through our limited perspective. We may well receive those points of healing in the manner we are looking for or in other ways that we are not looking for. If we have complete faith in the Lord, we can be like this woman and be healed completely, based on our needs for the moment. It may not look like what we want, and we may need to experience some discomfort along the way, but it can and will happen for us.

Healing the Blind Man (Mark 8:22–26)

Let's turn our attention to one of the blind men that Christ healed in the book of Mark. The scriptures do not provide clarification on how he heard about Jesus. We don't

even know if he sought out the Savior or if others had directed the blind man to Him. But these details are not as important as the faith demonstrated in this miracle.

Out of necessity, the blind man was brought by others into the presence of Jesus. While it is not laid out specifically who brought him forth, the context of the chapter suggests that the Apostles likely presented him. Perhaps it was out of timidness, respect, or simply because he could not see where he was and who he was talking to, but those who had guided him were also the ones who petitioned the Lord and asked the Savior to touch his eyes.

Christ took the man's hand and walked with him out of the city. Anyone who has helped a blind person get anywhere knows this can be a tedious task. The blind person must exhibit a great deal of trust as they rely on the senses of the other. We don't know how far Jesus and the blind man walked together, but it doesn't seem like a short distance according to the verses. Before healing this man, Christ took the time to journey with him. I imagine they talked along the way, as Jesus Christ was able to get to know him, as well as his struggles, better. Was this necessary for Christ to get to know this man? Probably not. Was this important for the man being healed? I absolutely think so. Being blind creates a certain level of isolation, even if others are around the person. Christ took him by the hand to lead him, not just beckoning him to follow. He didn't ask others to guide this man; He did it Himself in a way that created a personal bond. I love this illustration of Jesus Christ walking with us, by hand, in our challenges, sorrow, and grief.

After they exited the village, the Master Healer began His work to heal this man of his physical ailment. In a rather curious act, Christ spit on his eyes. There is no evidence that spitting in another person's eyes has any healing properties. In fact, there are advisories against letting spit touch contact lenses, as that can lead to potential infection. Nonetheless, this action was part of the process. We don't have a record of any complaint or questioning from this man. Perhaps the next step happened too quickly for any questions, or this man had complete faith in this healing process, no matter how different it seemed.

Jesus Christ then asked the man if he saw anything. The man saw men like trees, walking. This was certainly an improvement from being completely blind but probably not the result that he or others were seeking. Christ put His hands on the man's eyes again and made him look up. At this point the man could see everything clearly. He could have complained after the first action gave him only unclear vision; yet we have no record of this. His being able to see somewhat could have stopped further action from being taken, but he didn't stop Jesus. He let the Savior take further action until the healing was complete. It was only then that his vision became clear and could match what I believe this man could already see spiritually.

There is no explanation recorded in scripture on why this miracle took multiple steps. Christ, in His power, surely could have healed this man immediately, and the walk out of town could have been avoided. In a more sanitary effort, the spit could have been avoided, and Jesus could have made him see fully on the first touch. But He didn't, as there were more lessons to be taught along the way. Even though we don't completely know why this process needed to unfold the way it did, Christ did. And I'm guessing this man didn't leave that experience full of these questions. Christ gave him everything he needed through that extended interaction.

We can learn much from this relatively short story, which is only five verses long. But if we look at this interaction as a symbol of how Jesus Christ can walk with us, lead us along, work in ways that we don't understand, and even take more steps than we may feel necessary, we can gain a lot of faith in moving forward with Him. We can more fully trust in God as our Master Healer.

Christ has made promises throughout all of scripture and through His modern prophets that He will always be with us and support us in our trials. He will not leave us alone. If we allow Christ into our lives—and often even when we aren't actively choosing to allow Him in—He will be there with us and will consistently wait for us to ask for His help. Sometimes it is difficult for us to recognize His guiding hand in our lives, but He is there. He loves us and administers to our needs. Sometimes He is in the front beckoning for us to follow Him. Other times He is right next to us, holding our hand like He did with the blind man, and supporting our weight forward. Jesus may even stay close behind, allowing us to make our own choices in different situations. Even when we make choices contrary to His guidance and commandments, He will never forsake us. In the depths of our sorrow, in the glory of our achievements, and in the daily mundane activities, we always have the companionship of our Savior.

It is often said that God moves in mysterious ways. What exactly does that mean? We often set up expectations of how a situation should be handled. When we do this, we can easily miss the signs that God is in control. Why would Jesus Christ choose to act in unpredictable ways? I have asked myself this question many times. The more experience I gain within my counseling profession, the more I see patterns and what I deem the most helpful for resolving my clients' mental struggles. In order to see what the Lord has done, I need to see things happen in an unpredictable manner. I am much better at recognizing what it is beyond my power.

It is not requisite that God's actions be unpredictable. There are probably countless ways that He has used simple means to help that were not obvious to me. In times where it is critical for me to recognize His power, this is one of the methods that has helped me to be humble and teachable in that time.

Human beings learn best when asking questions, and God wants us to constantly progress. When things don't make sense, we start to ask questions. An omniscient being knows when we need to be pushed into the uncomfortable to create an environment where we can grow.

Many aspects of the gospel make sense, and this really helps my logical brain accept the truths being taught. But this approach doesn't require faith. If we accept the Savior's methods, though unconventional like with the story of the blind man, we are able to exercise faith in a way that fosters the greatest growth. We can then exclaim, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

I am grateful for Jesus Christ's willingness to take the steps that I may have deemed unnecessary. My limited perspective would often lead to taking shortcuts or other easier methods, but His way is not called the easy way; that is what the devil presents to us. But choosing the devil's path doesn't allow for growth or for things to be completed the right way. There is a process for growth that cannot be rushed, which I see more and more in the therapeutic process. The more we trust that these "extra" steps are necessary, the greater our ability to become what the Lord knows we can be.

Improving mental health is a goal of many. Sometimes God chooses to heal immediately; other times we are asked to wait, work, and overcome through consistent effort. Whatever path we are led on, may we have the faith to do things the Lord's way, even if we are only given limited vision.

The Roman Centurion (Matthew 8:5–13; Luke 7:1–10)

The story of the Roman centurion illustrates a different approach to healing. In the previous stories mentioned, Jesus was present with those He was healing. In this interaction from Matthew 8, the Roman centurion approaches Jesus Christ and informs Him of a servant who is sick with paralysis. Jesus immediately responds that He will go to the centurion's house and heal the servant. The centurion petitions the Lord to speak a healing command where they are and not go to his home because he feels unworthy for the Savior to be there. Authority to do such was compared to this centurion's ability to command within the military, knowing his orders would be followed.

The Roman military was the highest earthly power at the time of Jesus. It was well organized, and it was clear who was in command. When commands were given, they were followed, giving the Roman armies their strength. In making this comparison, I believe this centurion was recognizing Jesus Christ as the master of all, both in heaven and on earth. He acknowledged that all would need to obey Him, no matter the distance that separated them physically. Perhaps this is why Christ stated that this was the greatest faith He had seen, greater even than He had seen in Israel.

Jesus administered healing according to the request of the centurion. The gift of healing was given as he believed, and it was at this very moment that the servant was healed. Christ demonstrated that He truly could heal any person from any location. In this circumstance, Christ was healing a physical aspect only, at least from our understanding. This is different from the other stories that have been explored so far in this book. In those circumstances, His presence was necessary for certain types of healing. But for this circumstance, healing could take place in whatever manner was requested, even in a command.

Christ also demonstrated that He could heal others according to one's faith. We do not know much about the servant needing healing, as there is no description of the level of faith that they had, or what they may have even known about the centurion's efforts to seek out Jesus. All we know is that healing took place according to the request of another, and perhaps due to the faith of the person asking. I imagine that there are more requests to heal others than there are to heal oneself. This is not the only example of this recorded in the New Testament. Often, the faith of one will multiply the miracles that another experiences.

Christ, our Lord, is omnipotent; He can work miracles at any time and in any circumstance. We only need to ask Him. It can be very easy to think there is one specific path of receiving blessings. There have been times that I have waited for the availability of a priesthood holder to administer a blessing of healing. While it is not at all inappropriate to have a blessing administered by a priesthood holder, perhaps we can better allow for more steps to be taken prior to that happening. Could we do better in exercising our faith and allowing miracles to happen outside of the laying on of hands?

Is it acceptable to make requests or recommendations on how we want the Savior to approach our situation? We see no indication that Jesus had a problem with the centurion telling Him he didn't feel worthy of having the Savior in his home and suggesting an alternative method to conduct the healing. This man's faith allowed for flexibility in how Christ administered healing. This same faith surely would have allowed for him to receive an alternative approach to healing. When we approach God with an open mind, we are better able to recognize His hand and willingness to openly bless us.

Witnessing the suffering of others can sometimes be more difficult to bear than our own, as the centurion shows us. In these moments, our hearts reach out to them, and we may begin to exercise our faith on their behalf. The New Testament is filled with accounts of family members requesting healing of their loved ones. In many cases, the family member was unable to speak for themselves, whether by ability or, in this case, proximity. The faith of another brought the gift of healing to them. Unfortunately, there is usually little written of the faith of the one healed in these circumstances, indicating that their active participation in these miracles was not largely required. It is requisite for us to petition the Lord on behalf of those around us. Where our faith is strong, I believe we can lift up those around us and allow God to work miracles in their lives.

Requesting blessings for others does not negate the need of faith for those being healed, as God can work with little amounts of faith. Sometimes we benefit from relying on the strength of others, which can bring more opportunities for miracles of healing.

My Personal Healing Story

While serving a mission for God through The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, I encountered some medical difficulties. My foot broke without explanation, and the medical care around me was not adequate to heal my pain and allow me to continue to serve. This pain was as much emotional and mental as it was physical.

I had felt that following the missionary guidelines and wanting to serve would qualify me for healing. As the weeks wore on, the despondency increased. I put on a brave face and continued to do what I could to serve and preach the gospel. Unfortunately, this was not enough to keep me in the field during the healing process, and I had to return home and be treated by orthopedic and pain specialists. I was told that after six months I could receive a new mission call.

My focus was on the challenges that were ahead of me and what I was missing out on. I grew more and more depressed as I thought about the mission and chose not to share any of this internal struggle with those around me. I felt that it was my duty and responsibility to take care of this myself. However, there came a point where a doctor told me that I could accelerate healing by not only working hard but thinking positively about the process. After a few procedures and some physical therapy, I was able to return to the field in half the expected time, and I was reassigned to my same mission.

The challenges did not end there, as I had not fully gained the strength back to my foot, despite the functionality returning completely. I was assigned to a walking area for three weeks. My two companions were much more used to the rigors of walking everywhere, and I simply didn't feel that I could keep up. Despite my best efforts, I was slowing down this companionship, and I didn't like it. I prayed often for added healing or the ability to walk faster—anything that would make my situation less difficult.

After a period of frustration, I finally received some inspiration. The Spirit helped me understand that taking away the pain wasn't in my best interest. My body was being supported in being pushed past what it normally should have been. As a result, my body was growing stronger so it could eventually handle more. I was being healed, but not instantaneously. My strengthening was on a timeline that was much quicker than any doctor could have predicted. God was in this process, and I needed to open my eyes to what He was doing, instead of focusing on the pain of growth.

My emotions also had some healing to do. The confirmations of the Spirit helped but did not take away the pain. I needed to recognize that God was pleased with my efforts. This largely happened in conversations with my mission president's wife. She helped me understand that my best was different than at other times in my life and was also different from other people's best. This included my highly motivated and energetic senior companion. I needed to learn to let go of other people's expectations and focus on seeing that my Savior was pleased with me. Other voices were critical in this healing, and I am confident she was acting in accordance with God's help and direction.

My pain disappeared for a while but returned several months later. I kept it to myself for the most part, hoping that it would go away. I relied too much on my own body rectifying this situation. While I had been told that the nerve pain could come back, this was devastating. Why would this happen again while devoting my life to serving the Lord?

I was in a biking area this time, and one day my foot hurt so much that I couldn't keep pedaling with it. I needed to switch to pedaling with one foot. I called out to my companion to slow down, but he was too far ahead to hear me. So, I was left to myself, trying desperately to catch up and even remember where I was going. But my best efforts were not good enough. Before I could even begin to utter a prayer to ask for help, I noticed an ease in the difficulty of the task. The bike began to pick up speed along the flat loop. I was not going fast by any means, but I was now going faster than a snail's pace. After a couple of minutes, my companion returned to me, and we continued to our destination together. And best of all, we arrived on time to our appointment.

How this happened is beyond my understanding. All I know is that God was aware of my needs, and I received some divine help. I will never forget the feeling of peace that accompanied me as I was very clearly being helped physically along my journey.

This experience provided numerous lessons for my life. Healing comes in many forms. Having the right perspective will help us understand what is taking place. God knew better than I what I needed long term and still provided enough assistance for me to adequately grow. That has been a pattern throughout human history. We need to trust that God will do what is best for us according to His omniscience.

Jesus Christ is aware of our circumstances. He knew what I needed before I could ask, and I think He acts preemptively more often than we realize. If I had not already been as aware of my needs as I was in that moment, I likely could have missed the markers of divine intervention. Regularly looking introspectively at our needs can help us develop an appreciation for what He does for us so often.

May we take time to appreciate all that the Savior does for us. The examples discussed in this chapter are only a few of the many stories of the Master Healer at work. He never stops working for us and does it to accomplish His greater work of helping us become more like Him. The Atonement helps us overcome all of life's challenges, including all the obstacles in our mental health journey.

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