

FLYING CLOSER TO THE FLAME

STUDY NINE

Thinking Theologically about Sickness and Healing

Selected Scriptures

I do not know why God sovereignly chooses to heal one person and not another, but that is His choice and His right. I must minister to both.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

HUMANITY bears not only the image of God but also the scars of suffering. Our world is full of pain and hurt. We all know people who are enduring a physical or emotional illness which tenaciously clings to them despite countless prayers for relief.

We also know, or have heard about, people whom God miraculously healed. Their sudden recovery amazed everyone—including their doctors who had stamped their case file, “terminal.” And yet, God completely restored them.

While such miracles may leave medical experts scratching their heads, they send our hearts soaring with hope and confirm our faith. They also spark questions:

- Why does God heal some people while so many others still suffer?
- What about people who claim special powers of healing—are such claims legitimate?
- Would God heal more sick people if their faith were stronger, their prayers more sincere, and their hearts purer?



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There's no better place to find answers to these questions than God's Word. Let's begin our search by laying a row of theological foundation stones on which we can build a solid understanding of sin, sickness, and healing.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Sickness is a sensitive subject that may come close to your home. Your loved one may be desperately ill, or, perhaps, you are the one suffering. Share your questions with the Lord as you bring your pain to Him. Draw near to Him so you can feel His peace and find answers from His Word.

Father, suffering is a real issue in my life. With a humble desire to know Your heart, I acknowledge that Your ways are higher than mine, and I trust You with those mysteries of heaven that are beyond my grasp . . . but I seek answers. I come to Your Word for wisdom, comfort, assurance, guidance, and peace. In Jesus' name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

According to Genesis 1–2, God created humans in His image, and the first couple enjoyed a world completely free from the corrupting influence of sin. As we turn the page to Genesis 3, however, we see an ominous shadow stretching over the garden after Adam and Eve sinned. Their disobedience set off a string of consequences, including disease and death (Genesis 3:1–24). Let's take a closer look at sin as it relates to sickness and healing in the following Bible passages.



Observation: Foundational Verses

In the initial phase of *Searching the Scriptures*, we observe what the Bible says without shading the words with our own opinions. The following verses shed light on our subject from various angles. Read them thoughtfully as you answer the questions.



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Sin

What do you notice about the ways Paul used the word *sin* in *Romans 5:12*? Specifically, what do you see regarding sins as human actions: “Adam sinned” and “everyone sinned”? What do you perceive about sin as a curse: “sin entered the world” and “sin brought death”?

First Corinthians 15:21–22 further explains the curse of sin, adding a contrast between being “in Adam” and “in Christ” (NASB). What do you observe in these verses?

Sickness

How did David say his sin impacted him physically in *Psalms 32:3–5*?



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What assumption did the disciples make about the reason for the man's sight impairment in *John 9:1–3*? How did Jesus respond?

Healing

Paul healed sick people, as in the case of Publius' father who "was ill with fever and dysentery. Paul went in and prayed for him, and laying his hands on him, he healed him" (Acts 28:8). And yet, what did Paul do regarding sick Trophimus, according to *2 Timothy 4:20*? What's the difference between these two cases?

In addition, what was God's answer to Paul's personal prayer for healing in *2 Corinthians 12:7–9*?



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Review your observations from these wide-ranging passages about sin, sickness, and healing. What point stands out to you the most?

I've said all of my ministry that I believe in divine healing. I simply don't believe in divine healers. I don't think I've ever ministered to more disillusioned people than those who had been promised healing by a healer and they were not healed. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Theological Facts

In the interpretation phase, we draw out truths from Scripture that convey what the author meant. We can list six statements in thematic pairs that emerge from the verses we observed above.

Primarily, there are two types of sin—original sin and personal sin. This statement is based on [Romans 5:12](#), and other passages support it, such as [Romans 3:23](#) and [7:14–23](#). Look up *original sin* and *personal sin* in your Bible study resources and explain what these terms mean. For an online resource, consult [The Encyclopedia of the Bible](#) at [biblegateway.com](#).



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Original sin introduced sickness, suffering, and death to the human race. *Romans 5:13–18* and *1 Corinthians 15:21* elaborate this point. How could the first sin of Adam become the poisoned spring from which sickness, suffering, and death flow?

The graveyards are full of tombstones related to the fall of Adam. Had there never been original sin, how wonderful life could have been. Yet sin continues to pollute the human race. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Often, there exists a direct relationship between personal sins and physical sickness. David's experience in *Psalms 32:3–5* illustrates this point, along with Paul's warning in *1 Corinthians 11:29–30*. How might personal sins lead to physical sickness?

Sometimes there is no relationship between personal sins and human afflictions. Jesus corrected the disciples, saying, "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins" (*John 9:3*). What can you conclude regarding making assumptions about the cause of a person's suffering?



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Jesus' heart is moved by your pain. He grieves with you over the length of your depression. He sits beside you in the hospital room. He is touched with feelings of sympathy for you in your weakness. It's not as simple as confessing sin and finding recovery. If it were, He would say so. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Sometimes it is not God's will that we be healed. Paul's experience related in [2 Corinthians 12:7–9](#) and also in [2 Timothy 4:20](#) confirms this point. How might we seek God's healing while submitting to God's will?

On other occasions, it is God's will that we be healed, and He does so. Paul's healing of Publius' father in [Acts 28:8](#) illustrates this point. Jesus also performed many healings ([Matthew 4:23–25](#)), as did the apostles ([Acts 3:1–7](#); [5:12–16](#); [8:4–8](#); [9:32–34](#); [19:11–12](#)). What was God's purpose behind all these healings? What aspect of God's nature and plan did they illustrate?

*Be careful what you promise a person who is sick. God does not forsake us. He is with us during the hardest times, but His presence is not always a promise of healing.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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Correlation: By His Wounds We Are Healed

Some Bible teachers point to *Isaiah 53:5* and *1 Peter 2:21–24* to say that Jesus' suffering on the cross promises physical healing for all who believe. Read these passages and explain your interpretation of the phrase, "by his wounds you are healed," in the space below. To what kind of healing was the author referring?

Christ's death promises deliverance from sin's curse and ultimate healing when we step from this life into glory where death and disease will be no more. Some, however, say that we can claim our healing now, and the only obstacles are unconfessed sin and lack of faith. How would you respond?

How anxious we are for relief from pain, ideally, instant relief! But how necessary is the period of waiting, in which we become wiser and deeper and in which humility has a chance to grow! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Application: What to Do When We Are Sick

Why does God heal some and not others? The full answer resides in the mind of God, which is beyond our comprehension. So, we view the subject of healing through the lens of faith, content to trust God's wisdom and rest in His sovereign plan. However, Scripture doesn't leave us wondering what to do when we're sick. James offers specific steps in James 5:13–16, which we'll discover in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study.

Until then, Paul helps us put theology into practice by his example in *2 Corinthians 12:7–9*. Paul wrote regarding his thorn in the flesh, “Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away” (12:8), freeing us to do the same. Ask the Lord to heal your suffering or your loved ones' suffering in the space below.

Paul also recorded God's response, “Each time he said, ‘My grace is all you need’” (12:9). Whether or not God heals you, He generously pours the balm of grace over your hurting heart. Share with Him your desire to receive His grace.



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Paul prayed for healing but received divine power instead: “I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me” (12:9). How might the power of Christ work through your weakness today?

God may not answer all our questions, but He does meet our deepest needs. As you close this study, thank the Lord for His compassionate companionship during your season of suffering.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You my Shepherd that, although I walk through dark valleys, I do not need to be afraid. “You are close beside me,” assured the psalmist, and I cling to that promise (Psalm 23:4). You also promise a feast of blessings and a cup that overflows awaiting me in Your house someday. I long for that day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

