

## Faith Healing: Is It For Christians



Faith healing is the idea that religious belief or faith can bring about healing or cure a sickness —usually through extravagant rituals that involve songs, communal prayer, wild gestures and laying on of hands.

**The Encyclopedia Britannica** states: *“The history of faith healing in Christianity began with the amazing personal ministries of Jesus and the apostles.”*

For many years faith healing has been performed by so-called clergymen; but also among non-Christian religions there are voodoo priests, witch doctors, medicine men, and others, who also allegedly do healing; they often employ magic and spiritism. In some lands, it is common to see religious people visit shrines where many claim to have been healed of illnesses.

Is miraculous healing a genuine prospect for those who can find no medical cure? Jesus performed miracles and faith healers today claim to imitate him. Jesus performed some outstanding cures. For example: *“There was a woman subject to a flow of blood twelve years, and she had been put to many pains by many physicians and had spent all her resources and had not been benefited but, rather, had got worse.”* Jesus healed that woman then said *“Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be in good health from your grievous sickness”*.

That act of healing was just one of many that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry. People today claim that God still performs such healings, through faith healers. How should we view their claims? Does the healing power come from the true God?

Many view faith healing as worth a try. Yet, alleged cures by faith healers are controversial. For example, 70,000 attended a meeting in Brazil, where two healers, amongst other things, promised to repair peoples eyesight. They danced and trampled upon hundreds of eyeglasses thrown by the audience. One of the healers acknowledged in an interview: *“I cannot say that all those sick ones for whom we pray will be cured. It depends on their faith. If a person believes, he will be cured.”* He blamed any failure to be healed on a lack of faith on the part of the sick one.

Another healer even promised to cure cancer. What happened? According to a report on his efforts, *“the promise was not fulfilled.”* And listen to the way the man conducted himself: *“During nearly two hours, he entertained his audience with sermons, prayers, screams, singing—even striking people, with a view to expelling demons lodging in their bodies. At the end, he threw [some items of his clothing] at the spellbound audience, and then passed a plate in order to collect contributions.”* Jesus and his apostles never engaged in such theatrics.

In fact a study of the Bible reveals several crucial differences between the cures reported in the Bible and those reported by faith healers today.

Jesus and his disciples never charged for their cures. “*You received free, give free,*” taught Jesus. They followed the example set by Elisha, who refused a valuable gift from a man named Naaman whom Elisha cured of leprosy. So, when faith healers charge for their services, they go against this Scriptural pattern.

More often than not, money seems to play a prominent role in today’s alleged healings. One healer reportedly raised \$89 million in one year through his worldwide operations. Church organizations also profit from pilgrims who travel to shrines in hope of a cure.

The healings performed in Bible times were more or less instant. When the apostle Peter saw a man “*that was lame from his [birth], he told the man: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk! Instantly the soles of [the lame man’s] feet and his anklebones were made firm; and, leaping up, he stood up and began walking.*” Today’s faith-healing cures however, can often take many weeks or more to work!

Noteworthy, too, is the fact that faith healers tend to focus on ‘functional’ illnesses, such as muscle or joint pain, schizophrenia, eyesight defects, or deafness—illnesses that can have a psychological basis. Surgeon Paul Brand observes: “*Once an ‘organic’ illness has set in — missing limbs or eyes, kidney failure, etc — miracles never occur.*” Jesus, however had no such limitations — **Matthew 15:30,31** (“*maimed*” = *missing limbs*)

You will also notice that the healings by Jesus and his disciples were performed with a minimum of ceremony. There was no exhibitionism or playing on emotions.

Was there good reason for the use of miracles by first-century Christians?

For 1500 years, the nation of Israel was God’s chosen people; but in the first century CE, Israel was rejected because of its unfaithfulness and replaced by the new Christian congregation. Those early Christians needed extraordinary help to give evidence to the outside world that they had Jehovah backing. Thus, miraculous gifts, including healing, were given the infant Christian congregation. These served as “a sign” to unbelievers.

Paul confirmed this: “*if we refuse this great way of being saved, how can we hope to escape? The Lord himself was the first to tell about it, and people who heard the message proved to us that it was true. <sup>4</sup>God himself showed that his message was true by working all kinds of powerful miracles and wonders. He also gave his Holy Spirit to anyone he chose to.*” This was evidence that the Christian congregation, which was then new, was approved by God.

The Bible tells us how Jehovah gave different abilities to the early Christians. **1 Cor. 12:28-30**

Notice that the Bible shows that not all true Christians would have the gift of healing, it was limited.

But once the Christian Congregation was fully established, it would not be necessary to prove it again and again, with miracles. After the death of the apostles, miraculous signs ceased as they were no longer needed. After speaking of the miraculous gifts given to certain early Christians, Paul said “*they will be done away with. . . they will cease.*” (1 Cor 13) They had accomplished their purpose.

**The Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature by McClintock and Strong** observes that it is “*a [fact] that during the first hundred years after the death of the apostles we hear little or nothing of the working of miracles by the early Christians.*”

Some argue that Jesus often said to those whom he cured: “*Your faith has made you well*”. So they claim that healing was based on how much faith the sick individual had. But by saying what he did, Jesus was contrasting those who were moved by faith to seek him out and were cured, with people who didn’t approach him and so missed their opportunity. Those who were healed were not healed by their faith; they were healed by God’s power. The Bible says this of Jesus (and his apostles) **Acts 10:38.**

In contrast with modern-day faith healers, who often blame the sick for lack of faith when no healing occurs, Jesus healed even some who had not yet put faith in him.

No confession of faith was required for the miracle to be performed. On the night of his arrest, Jesus restored the severed ear of the high priest's servant, although this man was one of the group of Jesus' enemies who had come to arrest him. Indeed, on occasion, Jesus even raised the dead! Such ones could not make a claim about having strong faith.

Neither Jesus or his disciples ever needed to offer the excuse that the sick ones were not cured because they lacked faith. The only lack of faith displayed was by people not making the effort to come forward to be seen whether a cure was possible. But for those who did come forward, a complete cure always took place. The flimsy and fraudulent excuses of faith healers fall flat. Sadly, many very sick people attend 'healing crusades' only to return home as sick as ever. As Dr. William Nolen observes: *"Unlike the orthodox physician, a psychic healer never has to take the responsibility when his healing fails. I must confess that I would like the option of resorting to such an excuse when I encounter a patient whom I cannot cure."*

Clearly, then, such modern faith healers are not doing what Jesus did. And it is hard to see that God would approve what they are doing.

Another thing to consider is the rate of success. Regarding Jesus it was said that *"all the crowds were seeking to touch him, because power was going out of him and healing them all."* In our day, do all who go to faith healers or to religious shrines seeking a cure get healed? Over the years, some in the medical profession have examined the claims of religious healers. What have they found? According to the **Daily Telegraph**, a doctor in England who spent 20 years investigating the subject said: *"Reports of miraculous healing are not supported by a single piece of medical evidence."* Some even claim it is harmful:

**The American Cancer Society** say that *"Death, disability, and other negative outcomes have been known to occur when faith healing was elected instead of medical care for serious injuries or illnesses"*

Many people sincerely believe that they have been cured by the power of religious healers. Could they have been victims of deception? What source does this healing come from?

Remember when Moses and Aaron appeared before Pharaoh to request that the Israelites be allowed to leave Egypt. As evidence of divine backing, Moses directed Aaron to throw down his rod and it became a snake. That miracle was done by God's power. But then the magic-practicing priests of Egypt threw down their rods and these, too, became snakes. By whose power do you think they performed their miracle?

Regarding the source of the power that such religious healers claim to have, the apostle Paul warned: *"The Man of Evil will come by the power of Satan. He will have great power, and he will do many different false miracles, signs, and wonders. He will use every kind of evil to trick those who are lost. They will die, because they refused to love the truth."* Such "healings" are part of the Devil's deception to draw people away from true worship. **2 Cor 11:14, 15** Jesus said one of the signs of the last days would be this: *"False messiahs and false prophets will come and work great miracles and signs. They will even try to fool God's chosen ones."*

But he also gave this warning: *"Watch out for the false prophets . . . Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in. On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many miracles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!"*