

Healing Today?

Andy. A preacher I heard recently claimed that God wants to heal all Christians who become ill, and Jane and I know some who say that in their church God is doing just that. Our friend Terry goes to a church where they have regular healing meetings and he has some really exciting stories of healing miracles. We can't match these with anything similar from our church.

Jane. That's right. And our local Christian bookshop seems to be packed with books all about the marvellous things God is doing. Surely it can't all be wrong? If only half is true then there are some pretty remarkable healings going on today.

Andy. So, where do we start?

Pastor. Perhaps the biggest problem in this whole subject is not whether or not the claims are true - we'll talk about that in a while - but whether the claims square with what the New Testament leads us to expect.

Jane. Oh, I should think that's easy isn't it? Jesus himself did great miracles, and in John 14:12 we read, 'Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these.' That should settle the argument. After all, Paul and the apostles did miracles of healing didn't they? Surely this shows that the promise was for all time?

Pastor. Well, hold on a minute Jane. You may have overlooked two things in your hurry to come to that conclusion. First of all, if Jesus is referring to miracles in John 14:12, he was not just talking about healing, because in the previous verse he says, 'Believe on the evidence of the miracles' - that includes feeding great crowds with a handful of bread and fish, walking on the water, stilling the storm and so on. Do your friends know where those things are happening today?

Jane. If they do they never talk about it.

Pastor. So we are being a bit selective when we apply the phrase 'greater things' just to healing.

Andy. You said Jane had overlooked two things. What's the second?

Pastor. Can you tell me where Paul or Peter or any of the apostles did 'greater things' than Christ?

Jane. I don't know that they did.

Pastor. They didn't! Far from stilling the storm, Paul was shipwrecked at least four times. Far from miraculously feeding great crowds he tells us in 2 Corinthians 11:12 that there were times when he himself was hungry, and instead of healing everyone he nearly gave up hope for Trophimus and in 2 Timothy 4:20 admits that he left him 'sick in Miletus.' And where did Paul raise anyone who had been dead four days?

Jane. So what does John 14:12 mean?

Andy. It might mean that for every Christian there is the *possibility* of greater miracles being done, though perhaps not all will actually see greater miracles.

Jane. But John 14:12 says, 'Anyone *will* . . .' not might.

Pastor. You have both missed the whole point.

Jane. Which is . . . ?

Pastor. What makes you so sure that the 'greater things' has anything necessarily to do with miracles?

Andy. I don't follow you.

Pastor. When Jesus said, 'Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing,' you assume he is referring to miracles because that's what he was talking about in the previous verse. What he actually says is that his miracles prove him to be 'in the Father, and that the Father is in me.' In other words *his* miracles prove his unique relationship with God as Father and Son. If anyone can actually do miracles greater than Christ himself then this unique proof of who Christ is must be blown apart.

Andy. So you are suggesting that when Christ says we will do what he has been doing and that we will do 'great things than these', he must be referring to something else.

Pastor. That's right.

Andy. But what is greater than miracles?

Pastor. Surely it can only be one thing: spreading the good news of the Kingdom and leading people into it.

Jane. That really gives me an angle on that verse I've never seen before.

Pastor. When you think about it you can see how obvious it is can't you? No one, not even any of the apostles, is on record as having done greater miracles than Christ; if they had done, it would prove they had a higher relationship with the Father than Christ himself. But telling others of Christ is far greater than miracles; it is greater in importance and greater in value. After all, our Lord saw his preaching as the most significant part of his ministry before the cross.

Andy. So we are able to do greater things than Christ in the sense of sharing the gospel with more people than he did? One tract, book or tape, or one radio sermon, can reach more people than our Lord did in his whole lifetime.

Pastor. Exactly. So, having properly understood one of the key verses used by those who press healing on us, let's see what the rest of the New Testament says about Christians and healing. Although we have just said that the apostles are not on record as having done any miracles greater than our Lord himself, they did in fact do some miracles. In 2 Corinthians 12:12 Paul writes about 'the things that mark an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles'. Just as our Lord did miracles that were signs of his unique sonship, so the apostles did miracles that were signs of their unique apostleship. If anyone since then could do miracles in the same 'league' as the apostles, it would mean that the apostles were not unique wouldn't it?

Andy. Agreed. The miracles of Christ were signs of his sonship and the lesser miracles of the apostles were signs of their apostleship.

Pastor. Not everyone would like your use of the phrase 'lesser miracles of the apostles', but I know what you mean. They did no miracles greater than Christ himself.

Jane. Presumably, since the time of the apostles, no one can do miracles greater than they did. That's why their miracles were special signs. But people *are* claiming to do greater miracles than the apostles.

Pastor. You are running ahead of us again. We want a solid biblical foundation before we look at what's happening today.

Jane. Sorry, I'll be patient. Go on then.

Pastor. Let's just stay with the apostles for a moment. Of course they did some great and unusual miracles, but, unlike our Lord himself, they were limited. Paul didn't still the storm, nor did he feed great crowds or walk on water, nor did he do anything like turning water into wine. When it comes to healing we have seen that he left Trophimus sick at Miletus - and you can be sure he had prayed for him. According to Philippians 2:27 Epaphroditus nearly died, and all the help Paul offered Timothy for his 'stomach and frequent illnesses' was that he should 'stop drinking only water, and use a little wine' - 1 Timothy 5:23. Perhaps the filthy water in Ephesus played havoc with Timothy's stomach, and Paul advised wine as a form of medicine to settle his dysentery because it was less contaminated than the water. In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul tells us about his own 'thorn in the flesh' which God refused to take away, even though the apostles prayed urgently that God would deliver him.

Andy. I've heard people say that Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' was not a physical illness.

Pastor. I know. Some suggest Paul was referring to fierce temptation, an enemy of the gospel - or even his wife!

Jane. I've never heard that one!

Pastor. Don't worry Jane - it wasn't! When Paul writes of the 'flesh' here, he means just that. The most natural sense of this passage is that Paul suffered from a serious health problem. Some suggest it was eye trouble because he was clearly ill when he visited the Galatians - he says so in Galatians 4:14 - and he reminds them in the

next verse that: 'If you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me.' Later in Galatians 6:11 Paul draws attention to the 'large letters' he uses in writing to them - maybe an eye disease caused short-sightedness which resulted in bad handwriting!

Jane. I admit that this gives me a new approach to New Testament healing, but at Terry's church they have regular meetings advertised as 'healing meetings'. When we've talked to him about it he says there were plenty of occasions of public healing in the Acts of the Apostles.

Pastor. That raises a very important point Jane. I agree that Terry's position sounds convincing, but it is a superficial reading of the New Testament.

Jane. How do you mean?

Pastor. If you read carefully through the Acts of the Apostles, you will notice a very interesting fact that is often overlooked. Public healing only ever occurred when the gospel first came to a town. Once a church was established, healing was confined to the local church, and even then it did not occur often. The fact is that there were no public meetings for healing. We are never told that the apostles announced in advance that they were going to heal. Healing was always a spontaneous response to an immediate need when a town that had never heard of Christ was being evangelized.

Jane. Is all that true? If it is, it really questions much of the practices of people who claim miraculous healings today.

Pastor. In Acts there are only thirteen occasions when miracles of healing are referred to, that is if we assume the 'signs and wonders' in chapters 2, 6 and 14 included healing. What is interesting is that ten of these thirteen occasions happened before the close of the first evangelistic journey of Paul; in other words, before the end of Acts chapter fourteen.

Andy. So, ten of the thirteen occasions of healing took place in towns that had never heard the gospel before?

Pastor. Not quite, Andy. The first four took place in Jerusalem, but after chapter 6 we never read of another healing there. I'm not saying they didn't happen; I'm just saying nothing is recorded. The fact is that in Samaria (Acts 8), in Iconium and Lystra (Acts 14), in Ephesus (Acts 19), and on Malta (Acts 28), the healing miracles confirmed the gospel in towns that had never before heard of Christ. They happened in the course of the initial evangelism and were incidental to it - they were not the main thing. Every other occasion of miraculous healing took place within the privacy of the Christian community. Once a church was established, never do we read of the apostles doing miracles of healing even when they re-visited a town. Interestingly the only healing recorded during Paul's entire second evangelistic tour, with the exception of raising Eutychus from the dead in private, were those at Ephesus, a city not visited during Paul's first tour.

Jane. Why do you think this was?

Pastor. You tell me.

Jane. Probably because God never intended miracles to be confused with the gospel. He wants people to respond to Christ and not to miracles. Where Christ had never been heard of, the miracles drew attention to the message and gave authority to it, but once some people were converted, it was their life and witness that was intended to draw attention to the Saviour.

Andy. Well done Jane!

Jane. Don't be so condescending Andy. I'm not stupid.

Andy. No, seriously, that seemed to say it just right.

Pastor. Throughout the New Testament letters there is really very little about healing. In fact, apart from three passing references to the gifts of healing in 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30 and one in James 5:14-15 there is nothing else said about the subject in any other letter. Actually in the New Testament letters there are more references to those who were sick than to those who were healed.

Andy. Interesting thought.

Jane. Maybe, but what about the letter of James? In chapter five he is fairly clear on the subject: 'The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.'

Pastor. There are three things to focus on in James chapter five. First, James puts it in the context of 'the elders'. That means it is in a local church and not a public meeting. The importance of this point is that the elders will know the sick people and can help them spiritually and pastorally and not merely pray for their physical healing. Second, James writes about anointing with oil. You need to understand that oil was used for many purposes in the first century. The Greek physician Galen, who lived about one hundred and fifty years before Christ, claimed: 'Oil is the best of all remedies for healing diseased bodies.' That's why, when the good Samaritan in our Lord's parable bandaged the victim's wounds, he poured on oil and wine. So James may not have been thinking about symbolic anointing at all, but about the use of medical aid - like Paul's advice to Timothy to take some wine for his tummy troubles.

Jane. So James is saying: 'Take some medicine and get the elders to pray for you.' But the word 'anoint' sounds like a religious action, or at least a symbolic action doesn't it?

Pastor. It may appear that way Jane, but the word for 'anoint' here in James 5:14 is actually the normal word for using oil or perfume as a household item. In this way the women in John 11:2, and Luke 7:38, anointed the Lord with perfume. This was not an act of religious anointing. A different Greek word is used for religious anointing, you find it in 1 John 2:27, where the Holy Spirit is referred to.

Andy. But still James 5 gives a pretty strong assurance that the sick 'will be healed'.

Pastor. Yes, and this is the third thing to notice. James qualifies it with what he calls 'the prayer of faith'.

Jane. What's that?

Pastor. I believe it is a special kind of prayer. Most of our prayers are faithful prayers, trusting God to answer as he knows best. But since we often do not know what God's plan is, it is never wrong to add 'if it is your will.' Even Christ himself once prayed like that so why can't we? The prayer of faith, on the other hand, is prayed when we are absolutely certain that we know how God will answer. That sort of prayer is not common and is in itself a gift from God. Paul refers to this kind of faith in 1 Corinthians 12:9 when he writes of the Spirit giving a gift of faith to some.

Jane. But don't we all have faith when we pray?

Pastor. Yes, but our faith is trusting that God will answer wisely; we don't necessarily know *how* he will answer. The prayer of faith is knowing how - without a shadow of doubt. I'm not talking about convincing ourselves, or pretending. This is a rare gift and a rare prayer.

Andy. You are saying that when the elders pray with this kind of certainty, the sick will be healed?

Pastor. That's right, and that is why James says this is the job of the elders. It's too dangerous to let just anyone pretend they have this gift and even the elders will not have it often.

Jane. Why do you say it's too dangerous?

Pastor. Because untold damage can be caused by Christians who tell people they are going to be healed - when in fact they are not. Or when sick Christians are told that they are only sick because they lack faith. It is just as cruel when Christians are told that consulting a doctor or taking medicine is a sign of not trusting in God. And it is tragically dangerous to be told that sickness can be cured by naming and casting out the appropriate demons. None of this is taught in the Bible.

Andy. There is another passage of Scripture that Terry is always quoting when this subject comes up. In Matthew 8 our Lord had healed Simon's mother-in-law and then we are told that he went on to heal all the sick that were brought to him. Matthew adds in v.17 that Christ did this to fulfil Isaiah 53:4, 'He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.' Terry says that this proves there is healing in Christ's atonement. In other words, when he died on the cross he carried not only our sins but our diseases, and just as we receive complete forgiveness by faith in his work on the cross, so we can receive complete healing by faith. Healing and forgiveness are equal benefits promised to those who trust in Christ.

Pastor. I want you to follow my reply carefully because those verses in Matthew 8:17 and Isaiah 53:4 have been seriously misunderstood. The first mistake is to assume that Isaiah 53 is all about the cross. Clearly it isn't. Let's turn to it and follow

through the sequence of the prophet's thought. Jane, you read verse 2 and tell us what you think it is about.

Jane. 'He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.' I suppose this refers to his birth, childhood and life.

Pastor. And verse 3?

Jane. 'He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.' I presume this was the reaction of the Jewish leaders to his ministry.

Pastor. That's correct. Now notice that the first part of verse 4 is still about what he achieved during his earthly ministry: 'Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows.' Then the last half of the verse and the next four verses take us to his cross. In verse 9 and 10 we read of his burial and the second half of verse 10 and verses 11 and 12 speak of his resurrection and ascension and all that he achieved.

Jane. So verse 4 is about his earthly life and ministry and not his death?

Pastor. Yes, and that is exactly how Matthew takes it; he applies that verse to our Lord's earthly healing ministry and not to the cross.

Andy. You are sure about this?

Pastor. Yes, because in Matthew 8:17 two different words are used for 'took' our infirmities and 'carried' our diseases; they are *lambano*, to receive, and *bastazo*, to carry away. The important fact is that these two words are never used in the New Testament to refer to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In 1 Peter 2:24 the apostle says, 'He himself *bore* our sins in his body on the tree', but the word he uses is *anaphero* which means to carry up on an altar. Then Peter quotes from Isaiah 53 but, notice this, he does not quote verse 4, he quotes verse 5: 'By his wounds you have been healed.'

Andy. So Isaiah 53:4 refers to what our Lord accomplished in his life, and verse 5 refers to what he accomplished in his death?

Pastor. That's a fair assessment. Neither Matthew 8:17 nor Isaiah 53:4 refer to the cross. So we cannot use those verses to claim that every Christian must be healed perfectly and immediately because Christ carried all our diseases on the cross.

Jane. So, is there healing by the cross of Christ or not?

Pastor. Of course there is! If you turn to Romans 8:23 you will discover that Paul longs for the day when we receive 'the redemption of our bodies.' When will that be?

Jane. When Christ comes again?

Pastor. That's right. In the next verse Paul adds that 'in this hope we were saved.' John tells us in Revelation 21:4 that in heaven there will be 'no more death or mourning or crying or pain.' Only then does God promise perfect and eternal healing.

Andy. And since heaven is ours because of the cross, 'it is ultimately through the cross that we are healed.'

Pastor. Exactly. The cross promises us ultimate healing but not immediate healing.

Jane. That seems to have brought us back to the question you declined to answer earlier. There are lots of claims today of people being healed. I've read books, seen videos and talked with people like Terry. Are you saying it's all lies?

Andy. I don't think the pastor has ever said that Jane.

Jane. Maybe not, but he comes pretty close to saying it.

Pastor. I'm afraid we are living in a very gullible age as far as many Christians are concerned. If it's exciting then they believe it and if they don't ask too many questions they can go on believing what they'd like to believe.

Jane. But it can't all be false can it? Surely we believe that God can heal today.

Andy. Of course we do; we can't be a Christian if we deny that possibility.

Jane. But what's the point of denying the claims people make? If they are true we should be glad, and if they are false - well, no harm has been done has it?

Pastor. On the contrary Jane. If most of the claims are false then God's name is being dishonoured in a massive way.

Jane. I hadn't looked at it like that. You mean the world will think Christians are stupid, gullible or liars and they will scoff at God?

Pastor. Yes, but in addition to dishonouring God, these false claims are hurting Christians who would love to be healed but are not. Somewhere, someone must be failing them, whether God or their friends or themselves. But now *I'm* running too far ahead Jane. Let me face your challenge head-on and start with a definition of miraculous healing. If you use the New Testament as the yardstick, your definition of the healing through Christ and the apostles will have to be like this: 'The complete cure of a disease, disability or accident, immediately and totally and beyond medical explanation.'

Jane. So when an illness is prayed for and the person gets better over a long period of time you are saying that is not a miraculous healing?

Pastor. It may be, but no one can possibly judge. Many illnesses improve with or without prayer. Even major and serious illnesses regress to the amazement of the

doctors with no apparent explanation. All I am saying is that healing like that is *not* what we mean by miraculous healing. As Andy said earlier, of course God can heal if he wants to and I don't doubt that sometimes he does. In our own church we have seen some remarkable answers to prayer over the years. But the fact is that healing is not happening at the level some people claim for it; most of what is claimed is wishful thinking at best and unholy deceit at worst.

Jane. That's a big accusation. Can you support it?

Pastor. Yes I can. Much careful research has been done in recent years and I have completed two surveys myself. The simplest one I did followed a crusade in our area where for weeks beforehand healing meetings were advertised and people were invited to bring their sick friends. Great healings were promised and claimed. When it was all over I waited six months for the results to filter back to the medical profession and then I sent a simple letter to eighty-one Family Practitioners in the area covered by the crusade. My letter was not loaded but just asked them whether, in the light of this crusade, any of their patients had made a claim to be healed and whether the doctor would agree with the claim. I need not have bothered with the second question. Forty-nine replied and not one knew of a patient who even claimed to be healed. It is not unreasonable to assume the other thirty-two had nothing to report either. I am not saying no one was healed at that crusade, but if anyone was healed they were apparently not suffering from anything serious enough to be under treatment by their local family doctor. So, if miraculous healing is meant to be a sign to an unbelieving world, it didn't count for much in our area!

Jane. What was your other survey?

Pastor. That was much more detailed. I sent a four page questionnaire to one hundred and twenty-four qualified medics ranging from Family Practitioners to hospital consultants. All of them were professing Christians. I received full replies from two-thirds of them. The questionnaire was carefully vetted by three experienced doctors. I can't give you a full analysis of their replies now, but you may be interested to know that between them, those who replied had over fifteen hundred years of medical experience. Although twenty-four doctors knew of ninety-five claims of healing among their patients, only thirteen knew of any cases of miraculous healing that they could personally accept as reasonably genuine; these amounted to only twenty-one cases in total. That is twenty-one cases in fifteen hundred years of the combined professional experience of eighty-two doctors. When a Christian doctor read even those cases he declared himself 'mostly very unimpressed'. So I am left asking the question: why do our doctors, both in hospitals and general practice, so rarely come across cases of miraculous healing today?

Andy. Couldn't it be that doctors put such healing down to natural causes and refuse to believe a miracle? Doctors are a pretty hard-nosed lot aren't they?

Pastor. Perhaps, but remember, my questionnaire went to doctors who professed to be Christians, and all but one or two agreed with my definition of miraculous healing and believed in a God who could and does heal. In other words, they all would have been glad to see the evidence of miracles, but in fact very few even had patients who made any claims they could check out. It's strange how many infirmities there

are, such as Down's Syndrome and Rheumatoid Arthritis that our modern healers are completely incapable of helping.

Andy. That's all pretty heavy evidence against the mass of claims today.

Pastor. I'm afraid my surveys are supported by every other piece of research I know of. Dr. Peter May, a GP in Southampton and a member of the five thousand strong Christian Medical Fellowship has been looking into this subject for years and he concludes that he has been unable to document 'a single case comparable to the miracles of Christ.'

Jane. That's heavy-weight too.

Pastor. Yes, and I've got a couple of quotations on file here that you may like to hear. Let me see . . . yes, here they are. Dr. C. Everett Koop was one-time Surgeon-in-chief of the Children's Hospital in Philadelphia and professor of paediatric surgery at the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. Until recently he was Surgeon-General of the United States - which is the top medical job in America. He believes the Bible and believes in miracles. For years he has treated children, many of whom had families and churches praying for them. Everett Koop writes: 'I believe in miracles. I understand that all healing comes from God. I would love to see a miracle of healing where God supervenes his natural law and heals by miracle. If I were to see such a miracle, I would be overjoyed. I would give God the praise. But now, in spite of believing that all healing comes from God and in spite of believing in miracles, I have never seen one.'

Andy. That's strong stuff! And your other quotation?

Pastor. This is someone I know personally and I have a letter on file from him. Verna Wright is Professor of Medicine at the University of Leeds and Co-Director of the Bioengineering Group for the Study of Human Joints. He has spent most of his forty years in medicine dealing with arthritis and rheumatism. He wrote to me: 'I have no doubt that God can heal. I have no doubt that in the ministry of Christ and his apostles God did heal miraculously. I have no doubt that in answer to prayer God does touch the lives of those afflicted by sickness. What I do not believe is that if people have sufficient faith they will be healed. That is true neither to Scripture nor to experience. Indeed, in forty years of medical practice I have yet to see an authenticated case of miraculous healing in the New Testament sense of the term, although many claims have been drawn to my attention.'

Jane. But if all this is true how do we account for the books and videos and claims that are all around us today? Maybe some of it is true, but what about the rest?

Andy. We put it down to gullible Christians I suppose. I mean, Christians who think they see what they want to see.

Pastor. Partly, and a considerable input of high powered con men. A friend of mine recently attended a big healing meeting at Earls Court in London, and his wife wrote to me after their visit. This is part of her letter: 'Amongst many other spurious claims (the evangelist) pointed to a deaf man who was apparently healed and of course the

crowd roared its approval. He pointed him out so Roger was able to find the man and talk with him. The man could not hear at all! It was all most distressing.' Can you see how that kind of thing dishonours God, discredits the gospel and causes great pain and hurt to people who sincerely trust the evangelist? We must encourage Christians today to stop pretending and to start living in reality. After all, the true church has steadily grown over the centuries without relying upon the false claims that are made today. It's frankly silly that some Christians are still clambering on to the 'signs and wonders' bandwagon when the wheel fell off years ago. That kind of pretending gets us nowhere.

Jane. But you do believe God can heal?

Pastor. Of course I do Jane, and I don't doubt that here and there he does, so if you find me an account of a person genuinely healed in a miraculous way I will rejoice with you; but I fully agree with Professor Verna Wright that it is true neither to Scripture nor experience to believe that everyone who has faith will be healed. There are so many books today that tell us all we have to do is to believe, and that whatever we ask for will happen . . .

Jane. . . . But didn't Christ himself promise that in John 15:16: 'The Father will give you whatever you ask in my name'?

Pastor. But the phrase 'in my name' is a very important qualification. That is not a promise that you can get anything from God just by adding the name of Jesus like some magic key. It means that what we ask for must be in line with the character of Christ and the plans he has for us. Contrary to what some preachers and writers tell us, God never gives us a blank cheque to fill in. I'm afraid we can't be trusted that much. A friend of mine once talked with a poor man who was so convinced that God was going to heal him at a big healing crusade that he persuaded some friends to get him to the meeting but he told them not to bother to collect him afterwards because he would walk home. No one can say that he didn't have faith! At the close of the meeting my friend found him alone and in tears - still sitting in his wheelchair.

Jane. That was cruel.

Pastor. Precisely! You can hear lots of stories of earaches and backaches and headaches being healed, but all this proves nothing. A good dose of auto-suggestion works almost as well as paracetamol!

Andy. But not as well as a miracle would.

Pastor. Not quite, but it can clear up a lot of aches and pains. If the world is going to be convinced of miraculous healing, it will need many more genuine 'hard' cases that can stand investigation and a lot less pretending. Please understand that I am not saying that God does not heal people today. I am sure he does and, because God is sovereign, he sometimes works more in one part of the world than in others at different times. There is also no reason why God would not use some Christians more than others in such a ministry. I would simply plead for honesty and integrity; and that is not too common on this issue of healing today. If someone claims to have

a gift of healing, let it be proved by the measure of the 'success' of the New Testament apostles, or else let's denounce it as a fraud.

Jane. Isn't that a bit hard of you? I mean, it's not always as black or white as that is it?

Pastor. Why not? It was in the time of our Lord and the apostles when there were no failures, only instant success. Of course we will pray for the healing of Christians who become sick. The Christian church has always done so and from time to time God answers in a very special way. But more often than not recovery is either slow and 'normal' or not at all - either way we should not be surprised.

Andy. So, why do you think God doesn't heal all Christians today?

Pastor. Simply because he has better plans. You see God wants the world to know that his people love him because of who he is and not just because he heals their bodies. Through suffering God often moulds the character of his people, giving them love, sympathy, courage and care. The story of the church is full of illustrations of this. Through Christians who suffer, God will also show the world what real faith can mean. As you know, Stewart in our church suffers from infantile paralysis; he is confined to a wheelchair and is often in great pain. When you ask him why God has allowed this he will reply: 'To show what can be achieved through four wheels instead of two legs.' My advice to you on this subject is to go on praying and trusting God in times of sickness but always to be prepared for God not to answer in the way you want him to. Don't be intimidated by all the triumphalism and claims that you hear; I can assure you that healing is not happening today as people imagine. We examined this subject from Scripture first of all and we must test everything by that. The evidence of Christianity is not healed bodies, but changed people living to the praise of God - whatever their circumstances. That is what our good news is all about.