



There is Hope

Experiences from my practice

Peter Reis, MD

Foreword

This booklet is written especially for the sick, for those who suffer physically as well for the one who are tormented by depression, fear, and anxiety.

I started writing out of a desire to be of assistance and encouragement to more people in their need for inner peace and physical healing than I happen to encounter as a result of my practice as a doctor and Christian.

Besides, I experience it as a commission to write this down for you. It is my hope that the reader receives out of it what I, respectfully, and with sympathy for his personal physical or spiritual need, put into it.

It is intended for everybody regardless of one's convictions, although it was written out of my own Christian viewpoint, something I can and will not deny.

To those people who are inclined to throw this book in a wastepaper basket because it is Christian – I would suggest strongly not to do it.

But if proven valuable to a few only, I believe these writings are serving their purpose.

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Encounter with Jesus

If you were one of my patients, you and I would gradually start to communicate, perhaps over a period of years. But now, perhaps abruptly, I want to confront you with the things God did in my life.

Maybe you are sick right now, or in spiritual distress; maybe you are burdened with inconsolable sorrow; or you are just searching for truth or justice. Whatever the case may be, I believe that what I am going to tell you is of great value. And if you are critical or skeptical, don't forget that I was certainly not less critical myself until the moment that.... But, let me start at the beginning.

When I was sixteen, I rejected the thought of a living God, and chose to live a life according to my own insight. During the holiday I hitchhiked to England. There I came in contact with a kind of commune, which opened the doors to a world of at first soft drugs and later on hard drugs, free sex and leftist, almost anarchistic, views. Within a few years, during which I also started to study medicine, I changed from a lad who was idealistically experimenting with a free lifestyle, without any norms, into a person who was thinking along radical lines.

My communistic view of society was in my opinion sufficiently justified by all the injustice I saw in the world around me. For five years, I was involved in different actions, such as those against the exploitation of laborers from foreign countries, against government regulations of the university, against coercive treatments in psychiatry, etc. I studied the most important books on Marxism; my expectations of the future were centered around a revolution in nations with political and economic oppression. I was totally absorbed with these issues and endeavored to deepen my insights along these lines.

I interrupted my medical studies to take a philosophy course in Gent, Belgium. There, however, isolated in my room, I became depressed. Psychiatrists would say that my aggression towards the outside world had become directed against myself.

Several months followed, filled with anger, emptiness, fear and depression. Being a materialistic, sober person, I was now confronted with the vast depth of my own soul. It frightened me and filled me with despair. Periods of over-exertion alternated with periods of depression during which I seemed petrified and void of any feelings. Though I used to laugh about the spiritual and unseen things, and had kicked in everything that had to do with God, my attention began to be drawn to books about people who had experience with the non-material reality, the invisible world. These books gradually undermined my belief in the claims advanced in the communistic and materialistic views of life. The spiritual experiences of Buddhist monks, described in Eastern literature, opened a totally new world to me. But how to translate this into my own life? Really, I had totally lost all my convictions and my inner being yearned for a way out of the darkness and emptiness of my existence.

In those days, my Dad went for a few days to a retreat at a Trappist monastery in Zundert, a small place in Holland. I was seeking rest and was allowed to go along. There I met a monk who was physically handicapped. The peace that flowed from this man impressed me more than the most scholarly dissertation. I didn't talk with this man so much about the Bible as I did about the lifestyle at the monastery. How I longed to live like that, secluded, inwardly at peace, away from the cauldron of the world I was in. As I walked all alone in the park I came

upon a small chapel. In it was a statue of Mary holding the baby Jesus. Then, for the first time in six years I prayed. I said, "God, if you really exist, would you save my life and take it in your Hand?" Nothing really happened, except that I was a bit more at peace.

A week later I had forgotten the whole experience and once more I was back on the treadmill of my fruitless thoughts and feelings.

A month later, however, I woke up in the dark early one morning and realised something happening in the room. In one of the corners a light appeared and in it the face of Jesus suffering on the cross. I felt so heavy that I started to cry, burdened down under the heavy load that pressed upon me. And then this incredible thing happened as the burden suddenly was lifted off me. That morning I realized that I had been through an experience of the greatest importance. Nobody knew what happened to me. Because of my depression I had become a stranger to the people around me. And words to tell what happened inside me I did not yet have. Something had happened that could not reasonably be explained, but that in fact and for sure had released me from the feeling of being in a dreadfull and frightened psychic state. What had haunted me, a dark nightmare sense of guilt and feeling of being lost, had disappeared. In it's place an atmosphere of warmth and happiness had come, which was connected with Jesus Christ.

The concept of sin never did have any meaning to me, but from that day on, I knew what it was to be lost sinner and to be saved by Jesus' suffering and by his death. By then I also knew that God's word of the Bible is true and not thought up by men; and also did I know that my own wisdom needed to be broken into a depression before I could see the truth of the gospel. What a wonderful time started from then on!

In spite of the fact that my friends considered me to be ripe for a mental institution, I was filled on the inside with the love of God towards my broken existence. From then on, God started to heal my entire life, my thinking and my feelings. This is a process of many years, and He is still working on me. My faith in Jesus, the Crucified One, but also the living One, - otherwise He could not have wrought the radical changes in my life - had its foundation in a deep experience.

This gave a certainty to my faith that was not to be shaken. With this experience in the background the Bible started to play an important part in my life. In it I could read what eyewitnesses had written about this Man. What He said; how many prophets had already written about His coming; how totally unique was this Person in this world.

Not a maker of yet another religion, but Someone Who died, rose from the dead and now functioned as the Only Mediator between God and every person. And that He lives I had experienced personally.

After this, yet two other experiences of importance have taken place, which, according to the Bible, are fundamental in the life of Christians.

One day I went to a meeting of Christians. While I knew that Jesus was living in my heart, I had not yet told this to others. During the sermon an invitation was given to come forward after the service to make a decision for Christ. I had come through something similar six years before. But at that time I had firmly made up my mind not to respond. (I am still sorry I didn't.) This time however it seemed the natural thing to do. Didn't I experience a deep personal contact with Jesus? The man sitting beside me and with whom I had had a talk during the intermission, knew how to help me overcome my shyness and together we went forward. Amazingly the only thing I said during my prayer at that time was: "Jesus, here I am.

You know I already made a choice for you."

At that very moment something unimaginable happened. An immense spiritual power went through my body from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. It went right down my spine. It was as if I had been electrified. Every fiber of my body tingled with the power that passed through. God had baptized me in the Holy Ghost. An experience like the disciples had at Pentecost. (Acts 2).

Hardly able to walk, I went back to my family, while I was shaking all over. I couldn't talk about it and I fell asleep with a feeling as if God's Power got hold of me.

The next morning I felt like I was in heaven. A river of joy flowed through me, everything was light, I shouted for joy inside. At the same time I was deeply, very deeply touched by what had happened to me. I stayed a few months with my parents, and every day I received a new supply of this stream of power and spiritual energy. Then I was baptized in Water by immersion – an institution, not of men, but of God Himself. In the Bible we read that He had the Word of God came to John in the desert, that he had to go baptize, a baptism of repentance and of forgiveness of sins. When I baptized my appearance conformed to the life I had lived – with hair down to my shoulders. There was a group of my best friends sitting in the congregation. Before I was baptized I had the opportunity to give testimony of my encounter with Christ at the time I was spiritually down at the dumps. This aroused many emotions among the people that were present, but I didn't even notice. I just felt great, thankful and happy. The baptism itself was an experience through which I knew that I had now publicly and definitely made a choice for Christ. Physically and spiritually, I felt totally clean.

The reader may perhaps wonder what my thoughts were about the world around us since that time. No change had taken place there as yet.

Poverty and oppression had remained the same and I still met up with many unhappy people. I was surprised to discover that the Bible speaks about this. I started to realize that God's way of dealing with all the suffering of His creation was His plan of regeneration. Not by means of a violent revolution, but by sending a Comforter who blesses the poor in their poverty; who gives joy and hope for a new earth; who fills the lonely and the estranged with true love and supplies men with new power to live.

In Ecclesiastes 4 verse 1 it says: "So I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun; and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power but they had no comforter." But now, with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the coming of the Holy Spirit, that the Comforter has come. And even more: God has a plan to totally renew this troubled and sorrowful world. You can check that out in your Bible!

In Rev. 21 I read: And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I, John, saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great Voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with man, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. For the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, write; for these words are true and faithful.

Thus, I gradually got a different outlook on my world. I also realized that it was necessary to come to a totally different attitude towards the people around me. How could I ever keep to myself the tremendous gift of salvation Jesus had given to me? This would almost be like being rescued from drowning myself while I allowed my neighbor to drown without doing anything about it. But instead, to share in word and deed what I have received, to love and not to hate the world around me and – for those who want to listen – to be a witness of the wonderful saving power of the gospel. Yes, to communicate the tremendous peace I have.

That I became a medical doctor after all, has a lot to do with all this.

A lot happened before I got this far. At first I wasn't so sure at all whether I should continue my studies. The Lord might very well have something completely different for me.

The easiest way to get an answer to this question seemed to me to ask for a "sign". I went to the University and said, "Jesus, if you want me to continue, have somebody meet me there who I know." I did not meet anyone inside that I knew, but going outside I ran into my sister, who – mind you – started to tell me how she had met a member of the faculty where I had to write my next exam. So that was that.

But how could I study, while going through such profound spiritual experiences? I am sorry to say that I could not. The results of my studies were terribly bad and almost two years went by before I could again concentrate on them. When I wrote the first part of the exam for my doctor's degree for the second time, I was confronted with the problem that I had to rewrite all the preliminary exams within a short period of time. I was in a panic by the time I had to do the last oral exam. I felt totally unprepared and it had indeed been almost two months since I had last spent time to prepare. The best I could do was to ask Jesus to help me. I went down on my knees and told Him my problem. Wasn't it His will too for me to become a doctor? I will never forget the way that day went by.

On the way to the University I went through a heavy thunderstorm. It was more like going to a party than to an examination. I had no longer any expectations. By the time I was waiting in the hall a few people passed me and I heard the one say to the other: "Yes, but all you need is faith...."

Why not, I thought. And with a little bit of faith that God indeed would do something, I went in.

Something very strange happened while I was answering the questions. I felt as if the windows of my memory were opened, I remembered the smallest details of the things I had read about which I had no motion whatsoever half an hour earlier. Figures and numbers came to mind that, strangely enough, were all correct. That's the way I passed the first part of the preliminary exams towards my doctorate.

If you think that from now on everything went easy, I have to disappoint you. The next phase of my studies was even more strenuous. Part of the difficulties were in my relationships with others. In my immediate surroundings were people with all kinds of needs, drug addicts, homeless people, alcoholics, etc. They needed help badly and I spent a lot of time to give it to them. As a result, my studies suffered.

There was also an onslaught on my spiritual life through contacts with Anthroposophy, that made a total break with some friends necessary. This did hurt me and gave me feelings of self-reproach. All these things prevented me from concentrating sufficiently on my studies.

And yet, my relationship with Jesus grew deeper and deeper. I got to know my wife and we had a special spiritual relationship. God started also to speak to me more clearly and to show me things about His plan for my life.

Calling and Breakthrough

In Joel 2 we read that in the last days of this world God will pour out His spirit on all flesh and that men shall dream dreams. Once I dreamt that Jesus himself was in my room. When He went away, a dove appeared which flew above my head. I woke up with a pleasant, warm feeling on my mind in which we are called to be a 'light in a dark corner'.

Another time I dreamt about a field of grain being harvested. The weeds were thrown into the fire. People were called to join in the labor. A whole series of this type of experiences indicated to me that besides being a doctor another task in the service of the Gospel was in store for me. The most extraordinary dream I had might well have been the one in which I was riding my bike through the red light district, searching for a house. When I woke up there was joy in my heart, because I felt that God wanted to communicate something to me. Strangely enough, that same night my Dad dreamt about the same area of the city. There he attended a meeting of Christians.

My wife and I married, our first child was born, but I failed in my studies. Each time I was sitting behind my desk a wall seemed to stand in front of me, that separated me from my books. This lasted a long time. More than a year I wrestled with this resistance, which made it impossible for me to study. The results were accordingly: failure upon failure. How was this now possible? I knew for sure that I was called to become a doctor.

Half a year before my last chance to rewrite the second part of the exams towards my medical doctorate, I was reading a book about praise. In the book an American pastor wrote how by praise he got through the biggest problems (Carothers, 2003) . So, despite my own scepticism, I started to praise the Lord. Two months before the last series of exams, when I tried to study again, I could not concentrate so I decided to praise the Lord! This continued for a month. Walking circles in my study and praising God for the fact that I could not do it. Suddenly, to my great surprise, the room was filled with the glorious presence of Jesus Christ. I fell on my knees and was surrounded by a light that filled me with a quiet inner peace. It lasted for days and enabled me to prepare for six exams. Considering the volume of work involved, the task seemed impossible. And yet I passed them all, which surely can be called a miracle.

After this, especially during the last year, I experienced total freedom to finish my studies energetically. Then, to my surprise, I became a family doctor; and that in a neighbourhood exactly like the one I had dreamt about years before.

As a doctor you have an excellent opportunity to practice your Christian belief, because you naturally meet quite a few people in all sorts of miserable situations, physically as well as spiritually. During a period of time you build a personal relationship with them. Once in a while you experience the joy, not only of a successful medical treatment, but also of the visible action of the Comforter.

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."
(Matt. 11:28)

Many times I have seen these words of Jesus Christ come true in the lives of people.

My own personal relationship with Him deepened during the seven years I have practiced. And there is a great peace in our life together as husband and wife. When, every once in a while, we open up our house to patients and acquaintances, you experience how good it is to talk about our life with Jesus. People who were burdened by depression or by fears, etc. Now experience the joy of the Holy Spirit. It simply proves that Jesus is not a liar and that He speaks the truth when He says that those who mourn shall be comforted.

Is it possible that a doctor believes in miracles of physical healing? Of course he can! If God's word proves to be true in my daily profession, beyond that which I can see with my eyes and beyond my own comprehension, then there is no doubt that physical healing is possible. Would a Creator not be able to restore his own broken creation? Can the potter not remake his broken vessel?

Healing

A few months before the end of my studies I woke up with a dragging earache - an ear infection I concluded. I had them all my life. That's the trouble if you are born with a cleft palate – something has been changed in your anatomy that makes you more susceptible to infection. Besides the misery of going in and out of the hospital and being operated on many times as a child and the difficult years of learning how to speak properly, you are also going through many treatments dealing with throat and ear problems. This problem lasted through my teens and was the reason I was rejected for military service. They don't like soldiers in the army that after a night in the cold or a plunge in a ditch suffer an inner ear infection the next day.

Since my twentieth birthday, I actually had a running ear all the time, and that didn't help my hearing. Still, I wanted to be a doctor, in spite of the fact that my doctor in high school advised me not to because of my speech problem. It is also hard to imagine a doctor listening to someone's heart and lungs when he has a hearing problem.

As I woke up that morning I thought of the many treatments the Throat, Nose and Ear doctor had given me that year, jaw washings, ear lancing, etc. I also realized that I often allowed it to drag on and took the ear problem for granted for many years. I knew that the Bible was full of stories about people that were healed by God after they had been in touch with prophets, with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, or with his disciples. I was a committed Christian for some years from now, but miracles of healing I had never seen. I thought, why would a mighty God, of whom the Bible says that he loves me and wants me healthy, not heal my ear infection? I ended up praying a simple prayer while I was still in bed: "Lord Jesus, I know you can heal me. How can I be a doctor with a bad ear? Please heal me from this chronic ear infection."

Shortly after, I started to realize that I had to ask forgiveness for having neglected those ears for so many years, which had caused the problem to get gradually worse. When I did that, something happened in my ear.

Suddenly I was convinced that God had touched my ear. When I went to my doctor for a check-up a week later, he told me that my ears were looking fine and that I did not need to come back again. The hearing test was excellent, too. All those treatments important, I had learned to treat my body more carefully. But this ever- dragging infection had miraculously come to an end. Is that no reason to be thankful?

We are on our holidays in Belgium with our whole family. The weather is bad. Suddenly our youngest child becomes ill; at two-and-a-half years of age, he is a happy-go-lucky little fellow, talking away – a little sunshine in our house. Within two hours he is struck with fever, breathes rapidly and is moaning. Daily I see sick children in my practice and I went through quite a bit with my two older children when they had their childhood diseases; flu, throat infections, ear infections and others. But this is different.

I notice that Johan – that is his name – is breathing with flaring nostrils. He had already been coughing those days. I think it is the start of pneumonia. Listening to his lungs with a stethoscope affirms that opinion. I hear the unmistakable sounds that go along with it.

My first reaction is: Let's go home at once, to see a specialist. This is not for me to fool around with, too big of a risk.

But my wife suggests that I handle it myself first. Finally I give my wife a prescription to get penicillin, but I made up my mind to go and see a pediatrician, in case the treatment doesn't take. After my wife has gone to the drugstore, I lay my hands on the sleeping child and pray fervently for healing. God speaks in my heart that there is no need to fear. I recall God's promises for healing and claim them. Quietly, I continue to pray, standing on these promises, with all that is within me.

After praying for half an hour I feel that God's great love flows through my hands towards this small sick child. As I am getting to my feet, I believe that God is healing.

Sitting around the dinner table somewhat later we all give thanks to God for healing our little one. The two other children pray too.

At noon our youngest wakes up. After ten minutes he toddles somewhat drowsily around and after half an hour he is completely his old self again. The fever is gone. I am really amazed, and in my heart resound the words, "See what faith can do!"

Healing through Faith and Love

God is Love

Imagine yourself a doctor who does not only has all knowledge, but also all power, all Faith, and all love. What would such a physician do on this earth?

He would- of course-go around healing.

Unfortunately, there are two things preventing him to do his work.

First, there are only a few people that believe that he can do it. Secondly, there are only a few people who can imagine that somebody exists who is so loving.

I am speaking about a very special physician. One who does not ever ask for money; who provided the means of payment for the healing himself. The Bible says: "By his stripes we are healed", and " He has borne our griefs". (Isa 53:4 and 5)

Can you imagine a doctor like that. I can't. It is almost too good to be true, too strange to imagine. It is contrary to every common way of thinking. The gospel tells us that He exists, that this Healer is alive. He is not only the best of all specialists of disease, He is also the best Psychiatrist. He is able to make you spiritually alive and to deliver you from sins. "Come to Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11: 28) "All" means everybody that feels like that.

Love and Healing

The love of God, revealed to us in Jesus cannot be compared with any other love on earth. It is a new love, a spiritual love, that has the power to forgive sin, that creates, comforts, blesses, raises up, but also exposes and destroys the spiritual power of the devil, which is evident in all sorts of diseases. I believe that if there is love and unity in spirit among Christians, an atmosphere is created in which God's love can be realized most powerfully. Lack of love, gossip. Jealousy, and sins like that in a fellowship or church, are causing diseases. The humbling of the church before God and of the members towards each other may well prove to be a condition for a renewed release of God's healing love.

How can there be a healing in the church, if there is no peace, but division? Is it love, when the churches neglect the laying on of hands and to pray for healing? While Jesus and the apostles clearly gave the example to do this. Or if it says to anoint with oil, and this is no longer practiced (James 5:14)

No, that is not love. And on top of that, it is disobedience to God's Word. There may be little faith in healing, yet it should still be like it says in Revelation: "Thou hast little strength but has kept my Word".

In any case, let there be obedience concerning prayer for the sick and love for one another with the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil. Is it not written that love

believes all things and hopes all things (1 Cor 13 : 7) The love of Christ in our heart is also the source of faith needed to enable us to do them.

Over the years, many churches left the responsibility for the sick amongst them to the medical world. That is not right. A responsibility placed on us by God remains always. No matter how difficult it is to pray with the sick, to bear disappointment, to be persistent in prayer while there seemingly is no change.

Disease of the Spirit

I have only a basic psychiatric training and many people come to my office with problems that seem hopeless, like depressions, unidentified fears, serious mental disorders, etc. Yet in this area of human suffering there is hope giving experiences that take place because of a trust in God's promises. I have discovered that God's Spirit leads in conversations and can bring understanding that is really fruitful.

When I became a family doctor I had very little spiritual contact with any of the patients. I felt this as something lacking and it took a long time of prayer before I had the first real talk, even longer yet before I prayed with my patients.

Is this so special? I don't think so. Notice what Jesus says: "Without Me you can do nothing". (John 15:5).

In my practice the first spiritual contact was with a female patient of my own age. She was in a depressive state because her friend was in a long-lasting coma after a serious car accident. One day when I shake hands with her, letting her out the door of my room, I heard myself say: "have faith that it will turn out right". A week later, a nurse said exactly the same thing to her, and so with this newly installed faith she continued to visit the unconscious man for weeks. Till finally he woke up, and recovered after a time of therapy.

She came to see me and said with a smile: "This faith of yours". But was it not really her own faith?

How much did I enjoy the simple talks we had after that about God's wonderful promises for her and for myself.

Another experience: during my office hours I saw a patient on behalf of a colleague who was away at the time. This patient, a man about years of age, shook all over, looked frightened and in a shaky voice told me his problems. At night he had attacks of panic, nightmares, and as a result of the racket he made he had been evicted from his room. Later on I understood that he had a drinking problem. The first time this man left the office with a tranquilizer, while I felt totally powerless to do more for him. He was one of these types that had reached skid-row, without any family, often to be found in a pub or a shelter. One of those persons in the grip of alcohol addiction. After he was gone, I prayed to God for a solution for this man in case I would meet him again. A week later- I had just finished my office hours- he walked in. More or less in the hallway, he asked me: doctor, if I swallowed at once all the pills you prescribed, would I be a goner?" What else could I do but invite him in to have another talk with me?

During our conversation, I told him of my own depression in the past, my own fears, and God in Jesus delivered me. I suggested to pray together, which wasn't so strange to him, because he was raised Catholic. With my hands covering his., we prayed together for his need. We claimed Jesus' promise: "if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done to them of my Father Which is in heaven." (Matt. 18:19) and "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). I invited him by all means to keep in touch and an inner peace gave me the assurance something good was about to happen to this man. One week later, a different patient entered my office, the shaky, fearful tramp had changed into a radiant person. I could not believe my eyes when I saw this. Together we talked some more about his life, his difficult circumstances, that had not been solved yet, but could be approached from a different point of view.

I realized that this man still needed lots of help, people that would stand by him and would support him. And a doctor is so limited. Fortunately a social worker pitched in., job possibilities arose, others took over the responsibility. You have to let go of someone like that if it were only for the fact that they are afraid to come again, because they think that they might bother you and you might have no time to talk to them. Some years later to be able to give more help to such people, in the room above our practice a rehab center was set up.

Another example is the lady I had been seeing for several years, with all sorts of physical complaints as a result of a nervous condition. Gradually she went into an ever deeper depression. I invited her to have a talk with me after office hours. While talking to her I felt I simply, quietly, had to listen. While I did- maybe even for ten minutes something happened: All of a sudden she started to talk freely about the problems that she had kept to herself for fifteen years. I had not said anything to draw her out, but I did sense the presence of the Holy Spirit, who seemed to fill my office. After an hour, we agreed to talk some more in another week.

The second time we talked, I told her about my own deliverance from a depression by prayer. I prayed with her to ask forgiveness of sins of the past. She forgave the persons that had hurt her deeply. The I thanked God that He would deliver her from the depression> When I came home the next day it turned out that she had phoned our house excitedly telling that she had received great peace and joy the evening before. God had really done what He promised in His Word and had given rest to the weary and the heavy laden. And all this in spite of the fact that I had mainly listened to her story.

If you have experienced a few of these things you ask yourself the question. How is it possible that what is not written in any medical or psychiatric manual is made possible by God through prayer and through faith in His promises? If we just give Him a chance and room to move.

Grief

As a doctor I naturally meet up quite often with people who lose a partner or with parents that lose a child. It is difficult to say something sensible or a word of consolation to people who mourn over a loved one. When they have no Christian background whatsoever it is even harder to say something. You can't simply point out to them that the separation is only a temporary one. But even with Christians this is inadequate and not in proportion to the depth of their sorrow. Again and again I feel helpless in a situation like that.

It is the same with a broken marriage, when endless talks don't lead to any changes at all, or with a parent who's estranged teenager leaves home. Situations without hope, for which, as a human being I have no answer. "Time heals," is the normal thing to say. I rather do not say that, but the people themselves always do. But what about God? Is He powerless too? Would He, while He gives the right answer in so many situations, have no answer here? Isn't He the Almighty One, for Whom nothing is impossible nor too extraordinary?

Let's take these inconsolable griefs to Jesus. He teaches in Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." – Not "perhaps" or "maybe" or "when they do their best." No, it says, "They shall be comforted."

This tremendous promise of comfort we find once more somewhere else in the Bible, when Jesus says to His disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever..."(John 14:16).

Jesus doesn't promise a little bit of comfort. He promises us someone Who shall remain with us always, and will comfort us always. There is a big difference between what we can offer and what Jesus offers. It's like the difference between a car and a car factory; or between a few heads of lettuce and a large vegetable garden. The car wears out and the lettuce is quickly gone, but the factory continues to produce cars and the garden, vegetables. The one thing is just for now, the other is lasting.

The unbeliever is looking for comfort in friendships, in his children, in his hobbies, in his possessions. All temporary things, things that give pleasure for a while, but are very short-lived. When the tensions and the discomforts or sorrows, are getting too much and these temporary things do not fill the gaps any longer, there is still the seeming comfort in the booze, the drugs, the sedatives from the doctor. The office hours of psychiatrists, social workers and physicians are filled with people that need comfort.

Happy is the man who has a personal relationship with God and finds his comfort in Him.

Then there are the many churches where people go for comfort, often to return home with only a little bit of it. As a doctor I meet many people that used to go to church, but have quit going. They did not stop believing, but things happened – human things – that disappointed them. Or an atmosphere of dryness developed and they weren't spiritually satisfied any more. God's promises are being preached all right – and they hold treasures of faith and hope. By stretching out towards the glory that lies ahead, people are relieved. But where is that experience with the wonderful personal Comforter God promises us?

It is good to have fellowship with other Christians – and it gives some comfort all right – but is it sufficient? Do we not put our trust too much in people only? When you close the door of

your home, is that loneliness not there again? You likely have the idea too that you are bothering other people, and the more so because you have the impression that others feel helpless and do not know how to relate to your sorrow.

Jesus knew, that besides the Word of God, and the fellowship with other Christians, you would need a personal Comforter as well, someone who would remain with you in your home, day and night, even in your dreams!

Someone Who would be able to gauge your deepest hurts or sorrow and strong enough to save you from self-pity, lamentation, the deep pit of depression or the restless sea of despair... Someone Who with Him on the Cross tasted the deepest depth of Hell and to whom He could entrust you with complete peace of mind. I am talking about the Holy Spirit. Who at the Pentecost came down on the first Christians in a mighty rushing wind with tongues as of fire, and afterwards came into the hearts of all the Christians of the first Christian community.

How glorious to realize that this Comforter is everlasting and therefore still present in the world today.

Or have you your doubts about this? You don't experience it perhaps. But had you ever prayed to God to send this Comforter fully into your life?

Perhaps you took only little sips at a time from the cup of God's promises. It is quite possible, though having a solid knowledge of the Bible and being a staunch believer in Jesus Christ, that you know the Comforter only partly. Did you ever feel completely satisfied, as if you were swimming in the sea of God's love...?

It is written in the Bible that a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ec.4:12) Many Christians know the Father and the Son. But what about the Third Person of God's plan of redemption? They see the Holy Spirit as an impersonal thing, a power or a feeling, something they only experience to a certain extent, during special moments.

This is far from the truth, if the words of Jesus are taken literally. Jesus clearly speaks about a Third Person - a Person with a Name; a Name so utterly important that Jesus included that Name for the people to be baptized in. Should we allow Jesus and the Father to come into our life and leave the Holy Spirit out? If you do this, you remain one of those Christians, who just like in Acts 8:16 believed and were baptized, but had not yet received the Holy Spirit (John and Peter had to be called to the scene to pass on this "gift of the Holy Spirit")

When I pray with people, after they have brought their needs before the Father or received forgiveness, I always pray for this gift of the Holy Spirit. Then I see them leave filled with new Power.

My experience is that this is lasting. Even when seeing them again after a long time I notice that the Comforter is still with them. In my own life, this has been of great importance too. After having accepted Jesus as the One Who was crucified for me to obtain forgiveness from God for me, I still was restless and confused for about a month. When the Holy Spirit came fully in my life I received Power with joy and a sea of restfulness in my heart.

This Comforter in my opinion, is the Only One Who has the answer for the inconsolable ones. I have seen how Jesus sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of patients, regardless of the

sickness being physical or spiritual and I have noticed the changes He brings into their lives. In case you would ask, "How can I receive Him?", it is good to listen to what Jesus has to say. "If a son shall ask bread of any of that is a father, will he give him a stone, or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him" (Luke 11:11-13). Let us pray for this gift, and open the door of our life wide to let this Comforter come in.

Are you really called?

A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servants to tell those who had been invited: Come, for everything is now ready. But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said: I have just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.

Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. still another said, I just got married so I can't come. The servant came back, and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant: 'go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame'. 'Sir', he servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room. Then the master told his servant: go out to the roads and country lanes, and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men that were invited shall taste of my banquet.' (Luke 14:16-24, NIV)

What strikes me in this parable of our Lord Jesus is, that it's the sick and the poor that are invited to the meal; people that are lame, blind and maimed. It reminds me of the prophesy of old in Isaiah 61: "The Lord has anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Again is the sick, the depressed, the mourning and spiritually bound people that are mentioned; in other words, the mentally handicapped ones.

At the time when I still had a lot of self-confidence, I was so excited about the possibilities in this world, so active, so happy with all that life had to offer me. But I also belonged to the ones that "refused to come". It was not until I had got into a depression and was bound by depression and was bound by dejection and fear, anger and restlessness, that I started to understand the good news. This preparation was necessary for me to listen to it and accept it and I was not disappointed. Glorious heavenly joy became a part of me. I felt like I had come home. The love of Jesus poured out into my heart, made me a child again, fully trusting. Jesus taught me how to relate to God. I "supped" with Him and was being satisfied with the finest spiritual "groceries".

Are you in doubt about the fact that God has an eye on you? It is especially you, the humiliated one, the helpless one, the sick one, the drug addicted one, the crippled one, that have His undivided attention. Look at Jesus. He spent all day among these people. What a love he had for them. That same love He has for you. This kind of people, and possibly you are one of them, are especially invited to come.

People may pass you by but God stays beside you in the person of Jesus. Beside your bed, or behind your door where you spend your unhappy day. He personally invites you to come to the feast. He does that today, now, the moment you read this. And God expects you to respond to the call. His love compels you to accept His invitation. What beggar, what poor

person, or what sick person or crippled one would refuse a free banquet? Only the most stubborn or suspicious one shall say: "That is impossible, too good to be true. You're fooling me. After all, I feel fine in my poverty, just let me be." I know that there are people like that, I do meet them too. They would rather commit suicide than bend their knees before God. Fortunately, most people are different and I notice how they thirst for the love of God; people like those in the parable.

While I was still studying, most people that were willing to listen to my story about my encounter with Jesus were among the alcoholics, drug addicts, homeless, etc. And now, while as a doctor God's special love for this group of people. Perhaps you are one of them, and fit somewhere in this category of people. Ask God, even today, to admit you to His banquet table. Jesus says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to live and will sup with him and he with me." (Rev. 3:20) So this is what you must do: ask Jesus to come into your life in order for you to sup with Him. And he won't disappoint you; I am convinced of that.

The need of Prayer

“Ask, and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives ; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matt. 7:7,8)

What a promise Jesus gives here and what a mystery when you know the power of prayer in your life.

Nevertheless, most people don't realize this and consider prayer to be a senseless business. How often do I not hear out of the mouth of a sick person: “Ah, it doesn't help anyway.”? Such a statement often hides a disappointment, something that happened in the past. There are many people who believe that at some point in their life they have been let down by God. This is often the case when things turned out differently for them than they had wanted or expected, often also because of lack of understanding, when certain things happened as they did, such as sufferings or something sad. For instance, I once talked to a patient who as a child had not been able to accept the death of her father, and her family had not understood her dilemma, and now, twenty years later, she was still full of reproach against God. She was not conscious of it, yet it showed clearly in our conversation.

Sometimes you meet people in a depression who seriously tried to pray, but did not feel or see any definite change. For instance, the alcoholic I met; depressed, with a broken home life, many contacts with justice, totally on his way to nowhere; told me that he really did pray every night before he went to bed. Many times I prayed with patients who said that they always had believed in God, but never had been able to apply their faith in everyday life in such a way that it changed things.

How can it be possible, that people pray and nothing changes? Let us have a look at the Word of God for an answer. In the Bible, too, people are mentioned that pray, but don't easily receive. God has some requirements about the way we pray. Not as a despot, but so He can answer our prayers.

In the first place, it is important that you ask God with a sincere heart. In Prov.10:8 it says: “The prayer of the upright is His delight.”

Suppose somebody known as an untrustworthy person is asking you for something. You won't give it to him from the heart. In the same way, God appreciates an honest attitude when somebody is praying to Him. But which one of us, who decides to pray in a crisis situation, did not at one time or another say anything with conceit? Who didn't mock or shrug his shoulders indifferently before he got to know Jesus? And where do you get a heart honest enough so that you can speak to God?

The Bible says that Jesus by His death on the cross took all our sins upon himself. That includes dishonesty, conceit, mockery, and all untruthfulness that ever entered our hearts. There we find the right pleading ground, the right attitude of honesty before God, there where Jesus intercedes for us, defends our case as the heavenly Advocate, covers our faults by His love, and changes our heart completely, in fact removes the wrong things from it.

Therefore, if you want to pray and you can't because of dishonesty in your heart, ask Jesus to come into your heart and to bestow his righteousness upon you, to let it enter into your innermost being. Ask forgiveness for your dishonest attitude towards God.

Secondly, pray with all that's in you, with all your heart. The people of Israel had the commandment to love God with all their heart, likewise when we ask our Father in heaven for something we must pray to Him with all our heart. How do you do that?

Often we utter nothing more than a superficial, intellectual prayer without much expectation. It is important, what you put in your prayer: do you express your deepest need into your prayer or do you stay on the surface? We have to open our heart to Him in the way we are open to our very best friends only. No mumbling from a distance, but our deepest motivations have to be in there. It can be emotional, but does not have to be.

At times you have to pray the same things over and over again before you really pray with your heart. I am thinking of the parable of Jesus, where He compares prayer with knocking on a door. So then, sometimes you start with a hesitating little knock, eventually you get a little bolder and you start to knock a little harder. And if the door does not open yet, you knock unashamed until in some cases you end up banging resolutely on that door. Let's not be shy, and knock forcefully on that door of heaven.

What a wonderful promise that God isn't deaf, but at last opens that door.

The third requirement that goes along with prayer is that it be rooted in faith in God. How can you pray if you have no faith that God is listening and answers prayer. How can you ask Him something if you don't believe that He is mighty enough and has the power to also bring about what you ask Him? The Bible tells us that with God all things are possible. Would there be one thing that Almighty God cannot do? Yet, we are still inclined to doubt.

Common sense people that we are, we cannot imagine that things can come into existence that are supernatural. Concentrated on the tangible, and the visible things, it is impossible to imagine what goes beyond. Even Jesus' disciples, that saw God in His Son in action by His countless miracles of healing, the multiplication of the loaves and the fishes, the water that changed into wine and finally the most impossible, the resurrection of the crucified, nailed, and pierced Christ, had difficulty believing. John writes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life that we declare unto you." (1 John 1:1)

Now read your Bible and remark how hard it was, even for the disciples of Jesus, to believe in Him. Even for them! Read about their amazement when miracles happened, when He rose from the death.

Well then, how much harder is it for people of this 21st century, born in a world of television, radio, the computer, cars, internet etc. to believe this two thousand year old word of God. And yet, it is nowadays still required of us to pray in faith.

But then, you are often in a situation in which everything has been taken away from you, in which all your so-called securities in this world suddenly have disappeared, so you don't even know any longer what to do; especially when you are sick, handicapped, inhibited or depressive. Then you start to crave and to thirst for something of eternal value, something that is everlasting. Then you are a good candidate to believe. No multitude of uncertainties

can any longer block your way.

Do you recognize yourself in all this? Why not listen to this word of encouragement. God knows your need, and He doesn't just put into your heart what to pray for, but with it the faith as well. Faith is not just something to thirst after, to stretch out for, it is also a gift of God. So, think not: For such a prayer, I haven't enough faith. Simply start to pray with the little bit of faith you have. And God shall increase your faith and make it grow through His Spirit. Don't let your feelings or your mind cause you to doubt, for it is written. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." (Jas. 1:6,7)

Are you like that? In that case there is only one solution to get victory over your doubts: put your life in the hands of Jesus. He is the One that went through a hell of doubts Himself when He was in agony and His sweat became like blood in the Garden of Gethsemane. He is also the One who went through many anxieties and uncertainties when He was crucified. He Himself shall raise you up above the doubts that are milling around in your mind. He shall calm the storm in your inner being just as He stilled the tempest on the Sea of Galilee (Lake of Tiberias) when the boat in which the disciples sailed was about to perish. He stretched forth His hand and commanded the wind and the sea to be still. He will do the same in your heart when you commit your life unto Him.

Jesus, the Living Christ, Who as you read this, looks at you, stands beside your bed and hears every word you are saying. The living Jesus, Who appeared visibly to many after His resurrection, and still does at times even now. Who revealed Himself through His Spirit to millions of Christians, with power, with forgiveness, with the healing of broken hearts, and the healing of sick bodies.

Is it still difficult for you to pray? You're saying yes, it is. Then I would answer: "If we only could pray together." How much stronger we are in prayer together. Talking together about these things, believing together, knocking on that door together. Pray, that God sends you someone, with whom you can do this. To pray together is often easier when somebody is with you, who is a believer and does not have a spiritual or physical burden.

Nevertheless, somebody like that is often not available. In that case there is only one way left open: take your need to God on your own and trust that He answers.

A fourth condition that is needed according to the Bible for successful prayer is that it is in line with God's will.

So, the Bible says clearly that God is moved with compassion over the sick and spiritually bound, and that is why He sent His Son into the World, to bring healing and deliverance. Read what is written about Jesus. "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor; He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom to the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners. To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn." (Isa 61:1-2; Luke 4:18, 19)

So your prayer for healing is definitely according to His will. However, God does not only want to see you physically well. Above all He wants to make you happy. That is more important to Him yet. What is the use, if He heals you physically, but you remain living in sin and be lost forever?

God's plan is to give the people on Earth a sanctified and eternal life again, which is in obedience to Him through Jesus Christ. When you don't look past your physical need, you miss out on what God has in store for you. We are like children, who often don't realize what is best for us. So let us when pray according to God's will for healing, first of all ask Him to give us Salvation and eternal life through Jesus Christ. For this is what He wants above all: to give you true happiness in your heart, heavenly joy and peace and forgiveness for all wrongdoing in your life.

Ask God to remove your disease, but ask Him also to come into your life and confess to Him that you are a human being with many faults and wrong things in your life. Do you think that you didn't do too bad in life? Do you have the same conviction as so many others that I hear saying, "I always lived a good life"? Don't fool yourself, don't be blinded by a misplaced feeling of self-sufficiency and pride. God's standards, according to His Word, the Bible, are more sacred and deeper than you may realize.

Psalm 14 says in verse 3: "They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy. There is none that doeth good, no, not one."

That's why Jesus came to earth. Isaiah prophesied already: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement for our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." (Isa 53:5,6)

Because God saw that there was no man righteous enough to live in His presence, He sent His own Son to pay for our iniquities by His crucifixion, so that we might be reconciled with the Father in Heaven and also that we might receive that new, glorious righteous life in our heart from Jesus.

How can you receive this? Put yourself in prayer before Jesus, Who is truly alive, and offer Him your heart. Ask Him to cleanse your entire heart, by the Power of His blood. Ask forgiveness for the wrong things in your life and then believe (know) that your prayer is answered, even though perhaps you do not feel anything yet. Make a radical choice! The Bible says: "As many as received Him, to them He gave power to become the Sons of God." (John 1:12)

Perhaps you want to accept Jesus, but you don't feel you are able to. One often hears, "I would like to, but it doesn't work for me." That is understandable, because as a human being you can be so preoccupied with feelings of pain, physical irritation, restlessness, fear, etc., that there is no corner left in your heart to quietly talk to God. The solution to that problem is that you simply make known to Him that you are unable to pray. Say it out loud! Take up that "hot line to heaven" and say, I do want to pray to you, Lord, but really I can't. Please help me."

I myself had difficulty praying for years, even after I became a Christian. Via this way I got out of it. I receive what is called the gift of prayer. God is able to give you the power to pray, when you can't pray yourself. The Bible says: "The Spirit itself makes intercession for us, with groanings which cannot be uttered." This He can do for you too. Then all of a sudden you

notice that you are praying unconsciously, without any effort on your part, and that faith lives within you. That is what God wants to do in your life too.

One more thing: When you pray to God, pray in Jesus' Name. Why? Because there is no one else by whom you can come to God. Only by the once crucified and risen Lord can you talk to your Father in heaven." In Jesus' Name" means on His behalf. He gave you permission to use His name. He even says "When you pray to the Father in My Name, I shall do it. The name of Jesus is the key to come to God. That name is the right "telephone number" to get in touch with Him. Jesus says: "No one comes to the Father, but by Me." See to it that Jesus knows you, then He shall let you know the Father.

Do you as a Christian need to accept sickness?

Can you give a ready-made answer to this question? I don't think it wise to try to do this. Yet I believe there is room for personal opinion.

As a Christian, one has to be resigned to trusting God, based on His Word. A negative acceptance of sickness, without bringing the condition before God in prayer, and without asking "Why?" as described in the previous chapter, is really sad. A dull, sullen resignation, without hope for healing is in my opinion not the right attitude for a Christian. Once I had a patient, a Christian woman who underwent a serious operation. Shortly afterwards she got into a spiritual crisis, ate no more, and had lots of discouraging and hopeless thoughts about herself. After reaching a low she rallied and started actually to live out of her faith and that improved her healing process tremendously. This is a clear illustration that we should not submit to sickness, but turn the disease over to God. As the Bible says: "Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) Only then can you accept the circumstances of your sick body.

Can you believe that God takes the disease from you and puts it upon Himself? That He wants to do that for you? Matt. 8: 16 and 17 teaches us about the Lord Jesus, Who "healed all that were sick, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying, Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses."

What He did then, He wants to do in your life today. He has not changed. The same Jesus Who lived then is still alive now; is seated on the right hand of God and now He is even more capable to bear your sickness than He was then. Someone Who is dead cannot do miracles. There are many instances in my own life that testify to the fact that He is alive. Especially through miracles.

Sickness is a limitation of the body and actually it is impossible to surrender to it in peace. You can, though, surrender your suffering to God in faith, like Paul and Silas, who surrendered their imprisonment in faith. While lying in chains in a cell, they sang songs of praise to the glory of God, until there came an earthquake that opened the cells.

In the same way, you can, in spite of being ill, pray to God, praise and thank Him, and through it have His peace and comfort in your heart, but you cannot totally identify yourself with your disease. If sickness is a work of darkness, while we live in the light of Jesus, let us as Christians battle our sickness with the weapons of light: faith, hope, and love, and not allow ourselves to be forced into despair and complacency without hope by the dark valley of suffering. I am thinking of what David says in Ps. 23, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Easier said than done, and that is true. Nobody shall under-estimate the weight of your burden. Yet it is God, who knows the weight and the depth of your suffering, who gave David this faith and inspired him to write the psalm. Did God's Son not endure an unfathomable suffering and struggle on the cross? Would He then not be able to fathom the depth of your suffering? It is He Who calls you in His Word to an attitude of faith. Another problem is the anger, the rebellion that you may have during a sickness or a handicap. "Why should this happen to me, haven't I always lived a good life?"

Now, you might say, don't talk about this to someone who is sick, or, it's easy for someone standing on the sideline to speak like that. This, however, does not change the fact that this is exactly what you are thinking.

What you always can do is to hand this negative attitude also over to God, so that He at last might take away your anger and give you His peace instead.

Next on the list are doubt and unbelief. "Am I still a child of God, now that I am sick? Is this a punishment? Did I do something wrong?" The spiritual crisis a Christian goes through is sometimes very deep. The only thing I can say is: let go of your doubt and look upon Jesus, who had such compassion for the sick. He never rebukes, He forgives when you go to Him. He loves you.

We cannot heal ourselves. But at times God wants you to take on a fighting attitude, to use your willpower to stand and trust in order to be healed. And maybe the Word from Exodus 14:14 needs to be heard in your situation: "The Lord shall fight for you and you shall hold your peace." And Isaiah 30:15, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

But maybe you have a strong and active character and you find rest by looking upon the Crucified and by giving thanks, that by His stripes you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

God goes His own way with each sick Christian, according to his nature and his character. Like the man I was reading about, who started to thank God for the disease that he had, and while he gave thanks he was healed from their sickness after they promised to serve God for the rest of their lives. Some well-known preachers have given testimonies like that. Whatever way you find with the Lord during your illness, let faith and trust be the only grounds to test if you are on the right track. In other words, let this be the road you go during your sickness as a Christian, the road with Jesus, from day to day, in suffering or in hardship, He will show you the road of faith and lead you to it. Praise His Name!

The Biblical Way of Healing

If you are sick, bedridden gasping for breath or in pain, it won't be easy to think on these things. How much faith does a sick person need to receive healing.

I don't think that it matters how much faith you have, but sooner how persistent you are. But let me try to build up your faith.

Do you love the Lord? The Bible says that love believes all things, hopes all things (1 Cor. 13).

Then many people think that God sends disease as a punishment for their sins. Though there is a connection between the two, Jesus bore the penalty for all our sins already. He was punished in our place. This reason to be sick found its end with Him, unless you maintain sinful things in your life – things like hatred can cause illness and hinder healing if the sin is not confessed.

There is one sin on earth, however, that makes many things impossible. This is the unbelief of man. God requires us to believe in His redemption through Jesus' death and resurrection. The crucified body of Jesus being brought forth from the dead by the creation Spirit of God. When seen in comparison, the healing of someone's body is somewhat of a small feat.

We read in the Bible about a paralyzed man who is taken to Jesus by his friends. Because of the crowd, the men climb on the roof and let their friend, with bed and all, down through a hole in the roof so that he lands right in front of Jesus' feet. The Lord then says to this man, "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5). Then to prove that He has the Power to forgive sins on earth, He adds: "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home".

This Word applies to all who are now reading. Jesus died for you also. He died for the entire human race and that includes you. Therefore, I can say: "In the name of Jesus, your sins be forgiven, and are forgiven"! No matter how big they are!

When were your sins forgiven? Almost two thousand years ago, when God allowed His own Son to die on the cross. What I say to you about forgiveness, I can also say to you with the same right and authority about your sickness. In Jesus' Name, "Get up and walk" or "Be healed of this disease"!

Now it is important to claim this big miracle in faith. Perhaps I may lead you in a prayer like this: "Lord, I accept your salvation with all my heart, with all that I am, and as I am. Thank-you for forgiving me by dying for me on the Cross. From this moment on I shall obey Your Word in my life."

After that, pray for healing:

"Lord, I have given my life to You. Give me now Your healing according to the promise of Your Word. May Your resurrection power in my life be manifested and visible to everyone."

Then thank God that He will realize His promises, even if you don't feel or see any change at that point. Now continue to thank Him for it. Be persistent. Grasp it, and do not let it be taken away from you by what people say or whatever doubts arise in your mind.

Read God's Word and the many promises of healing that it holds. Observe the miracles that are described, nourish your expectations and hopes for healing with these things. Visit services if possible where there are people who also believe in healing – and have them pray for you. One warning: don't discontinue your medical treatment which you presently receive. Generally speaking, medicines are a blessing for the sick body. When you experience that God has touched your body, don't trust your feeling alone, but check it out with your doctor. A real healing cannot be denied and becomes more significant still when confirmed by doctors.

Problems Connected With Being Ill

Experience has taught that people are met by certain obstacles when they place their hope in the doctor as well as in Christ. I would like to mention some of these obstacles.

1. The unbelief of people around you. Jesus was virtually unable to do anything in His own town because of the unbelief of the people there.
2. Because of heaviness, pain, feelings of weakness, you fail to see the power of God to heal.

Sickness can bog you down to feelings of helplessness and darkness to such an extent that you cannot concentrate on God and His promises. It is important that God hears and answers the softest, weakest prayer. Put your hand on the Bible as a token that you claim His promises and quietly wait. Do this as an act of faith by thinking it through and by prayer.

3. The false idea "This is not for me". It is important to look at Jesus who sent out His disciples with the words: "Go, and preach and say, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers". He makes no restrictions, so do not exclude yourself. In Luke 10:9, Jesus says: "Heal the sick". That means everyone and is sufficient. Your very presence and the fact that you are sick is enough.
4. Doubting, as to whether God wants to heal. God is sovereign and will only do the things that glorify His Name. I cannot see how somebody's disease can be 'to the glory of God unless it is a special case where someone's heart is being sanctified. In general, I have observed that sickness breaks down the human spirit instead of making it beautiful and more holy. Consequently, it gives way to negative endurance and discouragement. Health is to the glory of God, just as a good functioning mechanism honors its designer. Moreover, you are more able to have a function in someone else's life, or in your family and work, when you are healthy. The Bible teaches that God is good. It is easy to see that a father wants his children to be healthy.
5. There is faith, but the power of God's Spirit is lacking. Sometimes there is faith, but God's power is not manifested. The Power of the Holy spirit is given to the church, whereby some people specifically have the gift of healing. Combine your faith with action, and go to somebody like that, and be prayed over by the laying on of hands. Stand on the Word: "These signs shall follow them that believe... they shall lay hands on the sick and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17, 18).
6. A wrong understanding of what sickness is. Jesus showed that sickness is a spiritual power with its own identity. "Jesus rebuked the fever", says the Bible, among other things. You can only rebuke somebody who can listen. Consequently sickness is a spiritual power, which resists the prayer of a child of God.

Therefore a power must be manifested, stronger than the power and strength of the disease. This power is released by God through prayer and faith in Christ. The time factor also plays a role here. Great preachers see many immediate healings. However, there is also a gradual healing which comes forth as a result of long persistent prayer. Sometimes there is more.

Jesus says: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt 18:20) and "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (vs. 19).

So, corporate prayer is important. Call some members of your family and have them pray together over you with laying on of hands. You can also look for people who love you and start praying with them weekly or more often. In big meetings, often only a short prayer is possible.

The question, how do I believe the correct way? You can hear the reproach: When you don't recover, you do not have enough faith, or even worse, your faith is no good. Many people become confused by such remarks and also in spiritual need. Others don't even pursue this road of trust, for fear that they may end up with an attitude of faith which looks like faith on the outside whilst it is really covering up fear and unrest. The faith that leads up to a miracle of healing is basically the same faith as the faith that gives you the assurance that your life is forever hidden in Jesus. The faith that produces healing begins where the sick person meets Jesus and hears His Word. It is a gift from God. It is characterized by determination, steadfastness and peace. Even the human spirit cannot imitate this; it originates in Jesus Himself. To stretch yourself out of this faith, often means that you must give up many things resulting from your own burdens: a feeling of restlessness, impatience, fear, and doubt. Things that Christ takes away in order to create room for His gift of faith in us.

I am pleading for a relaxed, childlike faith in healing, whereby God Himself is responsible for the timing of the fulfillment of His promises. I plead for the realization that something always happens when and wherever there is prayer for healing. Often the one who is sick receives renewal or a blessing. Not a single prayer in Jesus' Name is without power: every prayer for the sick in Jesus' Name is in direct obedience to God's Word. However, God is sovereign, and that means that He, in His Wisdom, sometimes allows things to occur in a different way to our expectations. When someone dies, from our point of view, it is almost always a sad and terrible thing. From God's point of the heavens the person is brought home. Taken from an earthly living with all his burdens and problems. No matter how much faith there is in healing, He remains the boss.

In those cases I personally pray that whatever happens to a sick person, it may be to His glory. I once prayed for an unbelieving patient in this way. He was 70 years of age and had lung cancer. I believed firmly in his healing and initially he prayed along with me because he wanted to recover. However, a few months later he died a believer and in that sick room there was heavenly joy. We should humbly hold God to His promises of healing, trusting that He cannot lie, but leave room for another plan for our life.

7. Being tied up in negative thinking. Although positive thinking differs from believing, it does help. Somebody who says every day, "Tomorrow it will be better" undoubtedly stimulates the healing process. Thoughts of fear and pessimism work to the contrary. The secret is to include the promises of God in your thinking. Fill in your own name where the Bible speaks about 'the sick'. Start to think positively, in such a way that your mind does not hinder the work of God's Spirit in your heart and body, but rather facilitates it. Keep His promise in your life as something you own personally as a secret treasure. For example: "By His stripes I am healed". Store it up in your memory, write it down! Put such promise under your pillow, hang them on the wall, mention them in your diary... This may sound ridiculous, but with such a childlike faith, things that may otherwise seem foolish are fitting.

I remember how, after I had just become a Christian and struggled with a difficult problem, I placed the Bible on the floor, stood on top of it, and challenge the unshakable truth of God's promises to be as real as the ground beneath my feet. Use your imagination in the way you think. What He did for your neighbor He can do for you. If God has helped you before, He is able – because He does not change – to do that now also! Lack of imagination limits the possibilities of your faith.

In Luke 7 we read about a centurion who asked for healing of his servant. He compared

his own position of authority with the authority of Jesus. Such faith is supported by a great imagination. Compare yourself with the personalities of the Bible. From what, in your opinion, did the people around Jesus derive their faith? Was it not also from that which they had seen happen in the lives of others?

8. Hanging on to certain sins. There are spiritual laws as well as natural laws. Because most people deny the existence of a human spirit, apart from the mind and the emotional life, they do not admit the existence of general laws for this spiritual life either. Yet they have to deal with it daily as their behavior is influenced by their conscience and intuition.

Jesus says that all laws are summarized in loving your neighbor and God above all. Every person who breaks this rule in his activities exposes him or herself to another law, the law of destruction and of death. This is sin. It is like walking on a road with a ravine on each side. As long as you stick to the law of love, you have solid ground under your feet. But once you go to the right or the left and leave that road, you plunge into the ravine. The law of gravity takes effect, you make a fall.

The Bible speaks about the road that leads to life. Jesus says that whosoever follows Him, is walking on his road. He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6). Who on earth could ever accomplish this by himself? No one! Only Christ could do that. When we believe in Him, He does the very same thing in our innermost being and at the same time in our life. What a big miracle and what a secret this is. How completely inconceivable for the one who does not know Jesus, how wonderful for the one who follows Him. When a sick person prays for healing, but fails to seek first spiritual healing by holding on to a grudge or hate, adultery, theft, etc., He makes it impossible for his body to recover. That is like repairing a roof whilst the foundation is weak and the joists have rotted. Therefore first lay a new foundation in your life by God's wonderful forgiveness in Jesus Christ. After, the roof can be repaired.

Healing by faith and the use of medicine

For a long time I thought that what I was doing as a doctor with the help of antibiotics, painkillers, sedatives, prescriptions for physiotherapy (an endless list) was something completely separate from healing by the Holy Spirit. I thought that one thing was from people, and the other from God; the one from the world, and the other out of Heaven. Practically speaking, this same division leads to spasmodic actions by Christians, who, after a healing service flush their medicine down the toilet. The results are often disastrous. For instance: I know of a diabetic woman who had been prayed for and disregarded her insulin after some fellow Christians, most likely with the best of intentions, had advised her to do so. When she went into a diabetic come the next day, her husband ordered her never to get involved again in these so called 'prayers for healing'. To act in such a way is indeed foolish and definitely not to the glory of God. I think that both need to be regarded in their own right.

Medicines have their own value in bringing relief in the healing of many diseases. We ought to have great respect for the years of research and the persistence of scientists who make this possible; respect for the pharmaceutical industry, which invests tremendous amounts of money in research; respect for the many specialists who work 60 hours a week – often on call day and night. I appreciate all this greatly and consider myself, as a general practitioner, an exponent of this selfsame world of health care.

I consider the healing done by Jesus with awe and respect also. There is nothing more wonderful than to allow these two components to work together. When the pastor prays for the sick patient in the hospital together with the family, as is common in the U.S.A., the doctor, who may be a member of a church which does not preach healing, does not object; being aware of the fact that his patient desires it. The doctor respects the patient who is being prayed for by his pastor, though he may not be a believer himself.

I am just an ordinary doctor, and when I pray with a patient, it is nearly always because of a trust relationship which has developed between us, usually in situations where the sickness seems to be incurable or beyond medical help. Much more often, spiritual needs (fear, depression) are being prayed for. However, I do see the interaction between prayer and regular medical practice developing. Furthermore, there is a regular contact with other Christian workers in the health care system and they have the same experiences.

Where do we fall short?

I believe that the medical world should leave more room and should have more respect for the Christians who are seeking divine healing through Christ. I believe that the church should more fully exercise its commission to preach the gospel and to heal the sick. This should not only be done in the full gospel meetings, but also in the churches. There should be more respect for the medical science by the people who preach healing and the confirmation of healing by doctors should always be required in order to prevent mistakes. In this context, I am thinking of Jesus who healed a leper and told him to go to the priest to show himself as being no longer sick. (Matt.8:4)

Fear of disappointment

There are many Christians, who on the one hand believe that God can heal their sick body, but on the other hand fear that they may be disappointed. Consequently, they would rather not ask for healing, let alone go to meetings where the sick are being prayed for.

I am aware of this because people often approach a prayer for healing in a cramped way – fearful, trembling, and on their spiritual tiptoes. They do not realize that faith is a gift. In Ephesians 2:8 it says the following: “For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” Also, Jesus says: “No man cometh unto the Father, but by me”.

So, on the one hand, we have the wonderful promise of healing, on the other hand, we need the gift of faith in these promises. Consequently, you have to do your praying for healing in addition to your visiting a healing service together with the Lord. Sometimes you have to wait until God gives you a quiet trust in your heart by His promises for healing.

There is often a storm first in which you cling to His promises whatever the cost, until He leads you into still waters, and only then His promises become a reality to you. However, a passive attitude won't take you very far. It is necessary to stretch out and seek actively the fulfillment of the promises for healing, to the point that you really do receive faith.

Strangely enough, Christians who know the need of faith in prayer often receive healing with more difficulty than those that are just new in the Lord. Now, then, give your fear of disappointment to the Lord. Don't let anyone or anything influence you feel guilty of a lack of faith. Continue to stretch out for healing in order to receive faith. Calmly go to the meetings where the sick are being prayed for and when there has been prayer for healing, don't hesitate to be prayed over again, or thank God that He will answer the initial prayer. It is often the case that healing takes place only after long persistent prayer.

Assistance at death

As a doctor, I often attend to people who die at home. In this chapter I want to share some of my experiences. They have encouraged me tremendously and are apt to take away some of the fear from the readers.

One of my patients was a Christian woman with cancer. Although I had never had any spiritual contact with her, she surprised me with a question about healing through prayer. That way I found out about her convictions. Through the many meetings that followed, a deep spiritual relationship grew; not one of many words, but one of peace and of power. By her strong faith she encouraged not only the people around her, but also myself.

Another patient amazed when she called me by phone, not very long before she died, with the remark; "I am not afraid. I had a long life and I am going to my Saviour". This touched me deeply. Once I attended a friend of mine during his illness. During the months before he died, he showed such strong faith that I was strengthened each visit.

Another friend of ours, an elderly lady, was dying and stood beside the 'river of death' in spirit. On the other side was the glory of paradise, as sung about in a well-known Negro spiritual. She said: "Don't ever be afraid, it is just one step". One can't help but think of the Words Jesus spoke to the man beside Him on the cross. "Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise" And to his disciples, he said: "I go to prepare a place for you". "In my Father's house are many mansions". Death in this part of the world is somehow hidden behind the walls of hospitals. People, busy as they are, do not think about it. However, as a doctor I often have to deal with death, and many times I've stood by my patients as they went through this phase of life. Therefore, I have a right to talk about it. On the one hand, I would like you to reflect upon what you need to be encouraged. I have seen the value of faith in Christ. There is real power and strength in prayer during the death phase. I plead with you to realize what hope there is, namely everlasting life with Jesus!

I often think of the story of an American girl. She was seriously handicapped and would rather die than continue to live with her condition. Because she grew up in a Christian family, she actually asked God to take her home. Then everything around her became dark, while in the distance she heard the voice of her mother. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me" (Ps 23). After that everything around her turned glorious and light and Jesus talked to her about the necessity to go on living and about her future healing. This indeed happened, as she told me herself. Knowing this, one does not need to be afraid of death anymore. It is a conquered enemy. It is hard to talk with terminally ill patients about death, except when they have a basic faith in Christ, who has said: "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live".

Addiction

It is understandable that a person can easily depend on sedatives. It took a few years of practice for me as a doctor to discover how many people actually do use Valium or something similar. Some for even more than ten years and in ever-increasing amounts. What an ordeal it is to kick that habit. Restlessness, fear, confusion, sleepless nights, etc. As a result,

I have become very hesitant to prescribe these medications. Somebody in the middle of a period of depression once said to me, please give me some of those little pills. They make me feel so peaceful." How can one possibly refuse? In view of this it is easy to understand how you can become addicted, just as easily as to cigarettes, daily television programs, or the pills. You feel the need to relax, you want peace inside without having to think about yourself, your problems, your unemployment, the threat of being fired, the quarrel with your neighbor. All of these things, if battled with sedatives, easily become doorways to addiction.

Why take it so seriously? People often say that it is acceptable and sometimes even necessary within the framework of a medical treatment. Not so when addiction results in lung cancer or a premature death because of a diseased liver, or when admission to a psychiatric institution becomes necessary in order to be delivered from Valium addiction. In those cases the hard facts show that the limits have been exceeded. We are not yet even thinking about the families that have broken down because of one parent being addicted to sedatives or alcohol.

Yet I understand that these people have no choice because they cannot endure their inner turmoil or pain any longer. Life is indeed unbearable for many, and who cares about a little bit of addiction in such a condition? It may even create a sense of belonging, like the mainline among his pals, the soft drug user when he passes on his joint, the alcoholic in his pub.

You might ask yourself where does all this lead? Where is the end of this road, in a world where many people seem to be totally powerless to behave in any other way. It is clear that these people are not really happy, bound as they are, lead through the emergency exit of stupefaction of diversion.

In the eyes of some people it is also addictive to believe in God and live accordingly. They think that it is like being put in a strait-jacket and being dragged into a church which lays down the law, not allowing for any freedom. For them it is just a fake peace and a fake happiness that is found there. As was quoted in a pamphlet: "Isn't Jesus an addiction just like heroin is?"

What a difference there is on the one hand between the person who is searching for the reason for his existence and the purpose of this life, who meets Christ at his lowest point spiritually and on the other hand the one that takes a pill or drug to stupefy himself.

To know Christ does not mean putting on a religious coat and neither is it a stupefaction through the singing of psalms, nor the loss of freedom by submitting to a set of rules of do's and Don'ts. It means a release of those things that bind you- wrong things. It also means a healing and the discovery of rest within, not a false rest or an external exhibition, but an actual internal change which is real. There is also a tremendous power, enabling you to correct the wrong things in your life, to restore relationships, to clean up the messy life of

your household. "Christ as medication", someone once wrote, "use three times daily". Although it was meant as a joke, it holds a basic truth, the patients that have used Christ for their medication come less frequently during my office hours. There needs to see a doctor have become less necessary. Christ is the medicine not only to kick the Valium habit, but, as I discovered, He delivers from any kind of addiction. After I became a Christian, I quit smoking abruptly even though I had been addicted to it for a long period of time. A patient using heroin for whom the methadone program seemed insurmountable finished it without spot or wrinkle after he came to know Christ.

Do you recognize yourself in any of these experiences? Perhaps you would like to try the above prescription in your own life. Please give it a fair try. Don't make the mistake thinking that to have faith in God orders you to throw out all of your medication. There are many treatments for which they are useful. Talk it over with your doctor, let him connect you to one of the Christian rehab centers.

How difficult is it to completely surrender yourself to the doctors, and to put your life in their hands. It is even more difficult to surrender your life totally to Jesus Christ. However, although doctors may disappoint you, He never does. The treatment of the doctor is sometimes accompanied by pain, but it is wonderful afterwards when you have been cured.

Two diagnoses

Your doctor diagnoses your disease, but at the same time God also makes His diagnosis for your life. The doctor listens to your complaints, takes your pulse, listens to your heart and lungs and examines the places where you have pain. Then he devises a plan for you to get well and prescribes a suitable medication. God searches the human heart (Revelation 2 : 23), listens to your thoughts of anger, or despair and depression- and searches your attitude- if you are sincere and willing to listen,. Then He makes a plan for your inner healing and prescribes the best medicine that He has- his own Son. Finally He heals your heart by His spirit applying the unique medicine for which there is no alternative to earth, the blood of Jesus, the Crucified! The doctor administers a blood transfusion to a patient in a critical shock. God gives a powerful transfusion by His Spirit to the person who allows Him to intervene in his spiritual "anemia". The doctor saves the life of a patient who is threatened by death, God saves a person for ever from eternal death. "Though he were dead, he shall live", so that he will live even if he has died physically. A doctor often discovers the disease before the patient does. Many people are not aware of the fact that they are seriously ill- they belittle the disease or even deny the fact that they are sick. They are ignorant and do not recognize the signals of their body. As a doctor sometimes one must accept that, and prevent to make it more difficult for the patient.

Similarly, God discovers sin in the heart of man, understands the danger he is in. Very many people, however, underestimate the seriousness of all this. They are ignorant and have no idea about the inner man. In their emptiness they are deceiving themselves and are heading for an uncertain future, despite the sever diagnosis which has been made and written in black and white in the Bible. There are also patients with a strong constitution and a vigorous personality, who do not easily give in to feelings of discomfort and pain. They seem indestructible to the very last. There are also the self-made people who feel secure in the lifestyle they have created for themselves, having the idea to make the best of life here on earth. Yet they do not know God, nor the certainty of eternal life. Under the mask of confidence dwells the spiritual reality of being lost.

Some patients perish because they neglect the advice of doctors. Many others perish because they don't believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. That is why for the one, dying following an illness is a gateway to a spiritual dead end road. For the other it is a gateway to life as David describes it: "beside the still waters" (Psalm 23:2).

For one person dying is characterized by grief without hope, for the other, in spite of the sadness of the separation it is full of the joy and hope of a wonderful future and reunion with Jesus.

The doctor and God meet each other at the bedside of the sick one. There where the one does his utmost to end the physical suffering, at the same time the other labors with total dedication to bring about inner healing and renewal of man. The doctor administers medicine every day and patiently waits for the results, often the effect of the medication. God sows the seed of His promises in the heart of man and waits patiently, sometimes a lifetime, for the results, which is for man to put trust and faith in Him as Father.

In the same way that the doctor depends on the trust of his patient, so God depends on the trust that man puts in the person He has chosen to be Savior: Jesus.

The doctor does his best to raise up his patients physically. God may initially raise him up spiritually and then physically, or the other way around, but in either case he is concerned about the whole person. When you are declared healed, you may leave the hospital. As you step out on the doorstep, you experience the freedom that belongs to the people in the world. What a wonderful feeling that is! When you trust in Jesus you leave the darkness and enter into the light to experience a wonderful new spiritual dimension and freedom. Many medicines do wonderful work; what power they have, but they are nothing compared to the one great medicine that renews a person's spirit, soul and body- the blood of Jesus.

How difficult is it to completely surrender yourself to the doctors, and to put your life in their hands. It is even more difficult to surrender your life totally to Jesus Christ. However, although doctors may disappoint you, He never does. The treatment of the doctor is sometimes accompanied by pain, but it is wonderful afterwards when you have been cured. To confess that you are a sinner is hard, and consequently also to ask forgiveness. What a blessing though to meet the gentle Jesus, who says:"You are forgiven, I condemn you not, follow Me and I will take you on the road that leads to My Father's house."

Postscript

When you are a doctor and also a Christian you have a double calling. Very slowly you begin to see that the two sides in your daily practice become closely intertwined. On the one hand, you apply sober medical treatment, according to the current standards, on the other hand spiritual counseling. Where the one falling short, room is created for the other.

I am definitely not forcing Christianity on my patients. But sometimes, mostly with people I know longtime running into crisis situations, the spiritual relationship deepens. I am always amazed each time this happens. Sometimes it happens completely unexpected to me. Often it comes in answer to intercessory prayer for someone. When this happens, it is almost always experienced by both sides as something good. It is wonderful to know that in difficult situations, there is a heavenly specialist, Jesus Christ, who is always ready and able.

What right does one have to reach somebody with the gospel that you know professionally. It's better to ask, "what right do you have to withhold the gospel from anyone". The same impulse that brings you to resuscitate when people have a cardiac arrest, will bring you to hold out your hand and share the promises of God at the right time.

There are many Christian doctors in my country who do the same, some more, some less. There is even an international movement that holds to these principles. In the Netherlands the Christian Medical Fellowship, and for nurses the Healthcare Christian Fellowship. Internationally Christian doctors are organised in the ICMDA.

Website www.icmda.net

In my medical practise a foundation was formed in 2000 that supports pastoral care and medical work for the poor. Many more books were published by this foundation.

They are free to download on www.preisministries.nl

My practise in the Hague is now run by my daughter . You can contact the practise on www.dreishuisarts.nl

Internationally hundreds of medical people come in conferences together to speak over these things. If you want to connect, call the offices of these organizations to hear if there is a local group coming together in your city.

This booklet is not only my personal testimony, but also an account of my experiences as a family doctor. My hope is that it will be of help to you in times of sickness or when you have a spiritual need. It is not meant to hinder medical, psychiatric or spiritual aid of others, but rather to supplement these.

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