



# The Spiritual Component of Healing

BY ELDER ALEXANDER B. MORRISON

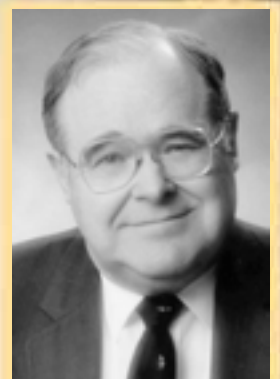
Served as a member of the Seventy from 1987 to 2000

**T**he scriptural accounts of Jesus's life and teachings are replete with references to His unparalleled power to heal all manner of afflictions. The Gospels record more than 20 occasions when Jesus healed the sick: from healing the nobleman's son at Capernaum (see

John 4:46–53) to restoring the severed ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest (see Luke 22:50–51; John 18:10).

Christ's curative powers extended beyond the healing of those with physical ailments to include “*all* manner of disease among the people” (Matthew 4:23; emphasis added; see also Mosiah 3:5; 3 Nephi 17:5–10). Jesus, in His infinite compassion, healed not only those with physical ailments but also others whose illnesses were mental or emotional.

These healings are an integral component of the Atonement of Jesus Christ. It is so powerful—so all encompassing in its scope and reach—that it not only pays the price for sin but also can heal every mortal affliction. He who went forth suffering pains and afflictions of every kind that He might know perfectly how to succor His people (see Alma 7:11–12), who bore the incomprehensible burden of the sins of all who belong to the family of Adam (see 2 Nephi 9:21), in like manner extends His healing power to all, regardless of the cause of their affliction. “With his stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).



*The divine gift of healing is tailored to the needs of its recipients by Him who knows them best because He loves them most.*

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**F**aith on the part of the recipient is the great prerequisite of healing. Without faith, the miracle of healing cannot occur.

### The Role of the Priesthood

The Savior, through His divine power, could heal all, but mortal men who exercise the authority of the holy Melchizedek Priesthood are subject to His will. Sometimes, because God's will is otherwise, they are not able to heal those to whom they minister. For example, the Apostle Paul "besought the Lord thrice" to remove the unidentified "thorn in the flesh" that tormented him (2 Corinthians 12:7–8). But the Lord declined to do so, explaining, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul understood better than many that tribulation and suffering are both necessary and inevitable parts of life.

President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) understood the wisdom in the limitations

placed on the healing power of priesthood holders. He noted: "The power of the priesthood is limitless but God has wisely placed upon each of us certain limitations. . . .

I am grateful that even through the priesthood I cannot heal all the sick. I might heal people who should die. . . . I fear I would frustrate the purposes of God."<sup>1</sup>

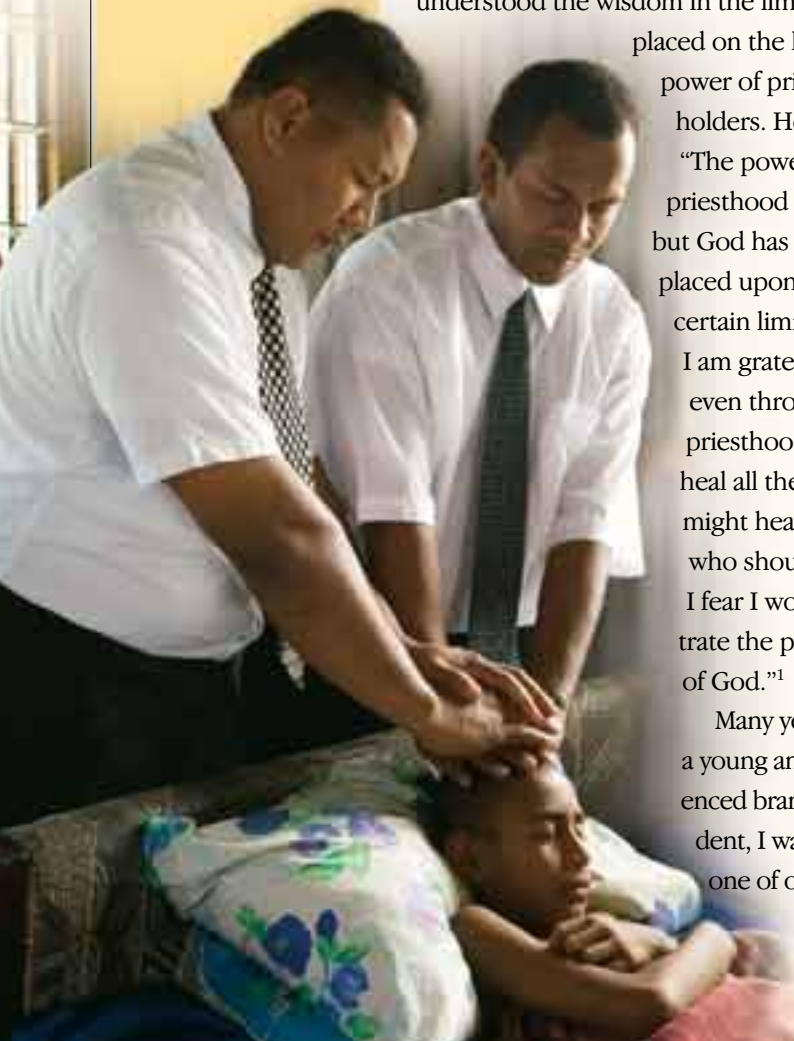
Many years ago, as a young and inexperienced branch president, I was asked by one of our branch

members to participate in the blessing of his grievously ill wife. The man obviously wanted me to bless her with complete recovery from her illness. That indeed was my intention; both the husband and wife were much-needed pillars in our struggling branch.

The husband anointed his wife's head with consecrated oil in the prescribed manner, and I proceeded to seal the anointing (see James 5:14). To my amazement, I found myself saying words I had not intended: the woman was "appointed unto death" (D&C 42:48). She would not recover from her illness but would slip away from us peacefully, cradled in the Savior's loving arms.

The woman died the next day, and I presided at her funeral, a sadder but wiser man. I had learned a great lesson: when we administer to the sick, our maxim must be "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42).

The divine gift of healing is, therefore, manifested in different ways, tailored to the individual needs of those who are its recipients by Him who knows them best because He loves them most. Christ's healing power may provide permanent relief in the sense that abnormal functioning of one or more parts of the body is corrected and the heavy burden of suffering lifted from weary hearts. But the peace, rest, and relief of suffering so devoutly wished for by those whose burdens seem oftentimes unbearable may come not from healing in a medical sense but from the gift of added strength, understanding, patience, and compassion, which enable sufferers to carry their burdens. Like Alma and his brethren, they may then "bear up their burdens with ease" and "submit cheerfully and with patience to all the will of the Lord" (Mosiah 24:15).





### The Role of Medicine

We should not believe that all who suffer from illness, whatever the cause, need only receive a priesthood blessing to have their burdens lifted, perhaps permanently. I am a great advocate and supporter of priesthood blessings. I know from *many* personal experiences that Jesus Christ, and He alone, has ownership of the precious “balm in Gilead” (Jeremiah 8:22) needed for final and complete healing. But I know also that God has given us wonderful knowledge that can be of inestimable assistance in dealing with suffering. We must, I believe, take every advantage of such God-given information.

Some persons who are ill, who have received a priesthood blessing and have prayed fervently that their burdens might be lightened, may feel that they suffer from a lamentable lack of faith if they seek professional help for their affliction. They may even stop taking prescribed medication, thinking erroneously that their faith will replace the need for it. Such thinking is quite simply wrong. Receiving and acting upon professional advice and the concomitant exercise of faith are *not* in conflict. In fact, exercising faith may *require* following the advice of experienced health professionals.

Wise health professionals—whatever their academic training or orientation, be it primarily medical or psychological—increasingly are aware that spirituality is a significant component of their therapeutic resources. As recently as a decade ago only a handful of medical schools in the United States offered courses in spirituality and healing, but now more than half do. Particularly with religiously devout patients, evidence is beginning to show that spiritual

approaches to the psychotherapy of depression, for example, are at least as effective as those that are purely secular. A growing number of physicians and psychotherapists now use spiritually oriented approaches and interventions in treating patients with both physical and mental illnesses.

### The Role of Faith

Faith on the part of the recipient is the great prerequisite of healing (see 2 Nephi 26:13; Mosiah 8:18; D&C 35:9). Faith—“the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1)—is a gift of the Spirit, bestowed as a reward for personal righteousness (see 1 Corinthians 12:9; D&C 46:19–20). Without faith, the miracle of healing cannot occur. “For if there be no faith among the children of men God can do no miracle among them; wherefore, he showed not himself until after their faith” (Ether 12:12).

Complete healing, which takes into account its spiritual component, also requires an understanding of our nature as God’s children and of our relationship to Him. The scriptures teach and modern prophets confirm that mortals are both body and spirit—the former corruptible, the latter eternal—and the two combined



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are a living soul. The Father's great plan of happiness teaches us that body and spirit separated by the death that comes to all mortals will, in God's good time, be reunited, "and all men [will] become incorruptible, and immortal, and they [will become] living souls, having a perfect knowledge" (2 Nephi 9:13; see also Alma 11:42–45).

Faith in a loving Heavenly Father and in His Son, our Savior—coupled with the understanding that we are literally God's children, with a divine opportunity to strive to become as He is, and a realization that His love for us is eternal and unchangeable—brings peace to our lives. That peace persists even if the medical, psychological, or social dimensions of illness—be they physical or mental in origin—remain as "a thorn in the flesh."

#### **The Role of Suffering**

I believe our spiritual strength is directly related to the extent to which our souls are stretched. But we should neither seek for

suffering nor glory in tribulation. There is no intrinsic value in suffering in and of itself. Suffering can wound and embitter the soul as surely as it can strengthen and purify. Some souls become stronger in response to suffering, but others bend and break. As author Anne Morrow Lindbergh wisely noted, "If suffering alone taught, all the world would be wise, since everyone suffers."<sup>2</sup> If we are to partake of "the fellowship of [Christ's] sufferings" (Philippians 3:10), we must pay the price of striving with all our hearts to know and emulate Him. That price may indeed involve suffering, but to suffering we must add compassion, empathy, patience, humility, and a willingness to submit our will to that of God.

The wondrous manifestations of Christ's love for all bring hope and encouragement to those who suffer from ailments of all sorts. His love is ever present and never failing. As Paul testified:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . .

"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 38–39).

Jesus, in His infinite love and compassion, knows of our trials and sorrows, for He "is mindful of every people, whatsoever land they may be in; yea, he numbereth his people, and his bowels of mercy are over all the earth" (Alma 26:37). ■

#### **NOTES**

1. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Spencer W. Kimball* (2006), 16.
2. "Lindbergh Nightmare," *Time*, Feb. 5, 1973, 35.

