

Teach, Preach, and Heal

**Twenty-one Prescriptions for the church on
Health and Healing from Matthew 9:35-38**

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This copy of “Teach, Preach, and Heal” is the unedited version of the essay as it appears as chapter 19 (pages 304 – 321) of the book, *In Spirit and in Truth: Essays on Theology, Spirituality, and Embodiment in Honor of C. John Weborg*, edited by Philip J. Anderson and Michelle A. Clifton-Soderstrom, Covenant Publications: Chicago, 2006. Dr. Weborg is a distinguished professor and theologian at North Park Theological Seminary.

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Twenty-one prescriptions for the church on health and healing

Rx #1. Bring health care to where the people are.	Rx #8. Be available for healing encounters at any time and in any circumstance.	Rx #15. Realize the harvest is ripe now and needs to be brought in with a sense of urgency.
Rx #2. View the teachings of Jesus as well as other teachings of the New and Old Testament as pertinent to health.	Rx #9. View the methods of the modern day health professional as a use of the agents and compounds of God’s creation.	Rx #16. Understand that teaching, preaching, and healing are the tools of the harvest. Use all three and use them in the context of each other.
Rx #3. Teach the truth even if that truth is controversial.	Rx #10. Include the supernatural methods in a healing ministry.	Rx #17. Address the challenge of the worker shortage through prayer for more workers – not by having workers alter their use of the harvest tools.
Rx #4. Lead.	Rx #11. Take on the compassionate nature of Christ. Suffer with people.	Rx #18. Anticipate a large harvest.
Rx #5. Connect people to their creator.	Rx #12. Design every ministry – including the health and healing ministry as welcoming to the poor and weary.	Rx #19. Rejoice not in the greatness of ministry results but rejoice in being a child of God and doing his will.
Rx #6. Develop health and healing initiatives as major ministries of the church.	Rx #13. Realize that “not knowing where to go for help” is not limited to the poor and weary.	Rx #20. Appreciate that God is in charge of the harvest. We are not.
Rx #7. Engage in the healing of all types of diseases – including the more serious ones and the ones not all that comfortable to deal with.	Rx #14. Be a shepherd.	Rx #21. Yoke yourself with Jesus.

It was the second Wednesday of the month and another busy clinic day. This was the afternoon I volunteered at Church Health Services, a local non-profit organization that conducts primary care clinics for the poor and uninsured. One patient our team, which also consisted of a nurse and a pastor, saw was a person we'll call Judy.

Judy was in her mid-forties and had symptoms in several areas of her body including that of recurrent abdominal pain. From our prior visits with her we were aware she had seen multiple doctors but none of the various treatments for this pain had resulted in any lasting improvement. Judy was now unemployed, uninsured, destitute, and without any significant family support or church connection. She was also frustrated, angry, and in pain as she leaned forward, rocking back and forth, with her arms wrapped in front of her abdomen. In our process of trying to understand her as a whole person, we discovered she had had a rough life and part of that involved being a victim of abuse. We

Jesus traveled throughout all the cities and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News of the Kingdom. And wherever he went, he healed people of every sort of disease and illness. He felt great pity for the crowds that came, because their problems were so great and they didn't know where to go for help. They were like sheep without a shepherd. He said to his disciples, "The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send out more workers for his fields."

Matthew 9:35-38 (NLT)

offered Judy some ideas on how her healing could proceed but we knew this process would not be easy for her or us. As we concluded the visit I entered the hallway somewhat fatigued from the extended interview only to see several more patients waiting in our reception area – many of them with the same look of hurt, desperation, and hopelessness. These people reminded me of the crowds in Matthew 9:37, where Jesus described them as having problems “so great and they

didn't know where to go for help." As I returned to the scriptures, I did so in its context of Matthew 9:35-38 and discovered a collection of themes that have made it clearer to me how people could be more completely healed, how I could be a more effective healer, how our health care system could be reformed, and how the church could thrive in the process. A series of "prescriptions" are in turn offered to the church to aid in making a difference in these most vital areas of life.

Teaching, Preaching, and Healing

Aside from his death and resurrection, teaching, preaching, and healing are the three activities describing the work and ministry of Jesus. In teaching there is the giving of systematic instruction as in the Sermon on the Mount and in preaching there is proclamation of the Good News.¹ "Jesus' preaching confronts the individual with the approach of the kingdom and its demands, whereas his teaching makes the nature of those demands explicit."² While teaching and preaching are distinct they are also similar in that sometimes the same event could be referred to as teaching and preaching as in Matthew 4:23, or just preaching as in Mark 1:39 and Luke 4:44. In healing there is "the restoration of normality of deranged physical functions but in the wider meaning which a Christian view of man requires, healing is the enabling of a man to function as a whole in accordance with God's will for him."³ "Healing, then concerns the whole of the human being and not just one aspect of it whether this be the body, the mind, or the spirit."⁴ As one considers the teaching, preaching, and healing of Jesus, it is significant to note this one man did all three and he often engaged in all of them at the same time, in the same place, and with the same individual or group. According to the author Ludwig, "Jesus consistently related His healing activity to the emergence of the kingdom of God."⁵

Teaching was the activity of Jesus thought most important by the gospel writer Matthew.⁶ Hare believes such emphasis was placed on teaching in this gospel because Matthew was concerned that the day-to-day lives of Christians in his community did not match with their profession of faith. “Not all people who sound religious are really good. They may refer to me as ‘Lord’, but they still won’t enter the kingdom of heaven. The decisive issue is whether they obey my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Jesus taught his disciples and the crowds, but the focus of his teachings was often his disciples.⁷ His special attention to his disciples is demonstrated in his parables, for Jesus taught the crowds with parables but later explained them to his disciples. The response of the crowds to the teaching of Jesus varied. Luke 4:15 says, “He taught in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.” Luke 4:28-29 says, “When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed him and took him to the edge of the hill on which the city was built.” The settings for teaching also varied. He taught on the hills, the fields, the lakeshore, the marketplace, and as Matthew 9:35 identifies – the synagogues which at the time of Jesus did not stand for “the place where Jews meet.” Synagogues were common civic buildings where townspeople met. They were like our town halls. Synagogue is a Greek term meaning to “gather within” or “gather together.” “In such gathering places people could debate, hear a pronouncement, law, or new inscription read aloud, vote if their political structure allowed for such activity, and probably engage in the religious activities that were so closely bound up with the political and civic life of the ancient city.”⁸

Jesus taught on numerous subjects and many are related to health. For example, Jesus begins his teaching with the beatitudes as recorded in Matthew 5: 1-12. The beatitudes contain a listing of

those characteristics God desires in his followers who he therefore blesses or makes more than happy. These characteristics include realizing a need for God, mourning, being gentle and lowly, hungering and thirsting for justice, being merciful, being pure in heart, working for peace, and experiencing persecution because of love for God. After these beatitudes his teaching continues in his call for his followers to be the salt and light of the world. Jesus also teaches about the law and said he did not come to abolish the law of Moses but to fulfill it. He teaches about murder, anger, adultery, swearing, divorce, and revenge. He teaches about loving our enemies and giving to the needy. He teaches on how to pray in the Lord's Prayer and he teaches about fasting. He teaches about the danger of money as a master and to focus in life on those things that have eternal significance in heaven. He teaches about worry and to not judge others. He teaches to keep asking, looking and knocking on God. He teaches on the Golden Rule in how we are to treat others. He teaches about the narrow gate to heaven and about false prophets. Jesus likens the listening and obeying of his teachings to the building of a solid foundation.

Rx #1. Bring health care to where the people are. While people came to Jesus, he also made himself available to wherever people gathered. One current health care reform proposal involves an emphasis on partnering with community organizations including where people “live and work, play and pray.”⁹

Rx #2. View the teachings of Jesus as well as other teachings of the New and Old Testament as pertinent to health. Medical theologian John Wilkinson says that “human wholeness or health” could be considered the main topic of the Bible.¹⁰ The Old Testament is directed more at health and the New Testament more with healing. The people of Israel found difficulty in being obedient to a way of life that would bring good health and a close relationship with God. A means of healing and restoration was needed and this came through the teachings, the miracles, and the person of Jesus. While Americans do have a great interest in health information, we tend to give priority to the teachings of medical science over those of the Bible. Perhaps an indicator of a need for a more balance source of health information is seen in the relative low health status of Americans for when our health status is measured against the health status of the citizens

of the other thirteen industrialized nations, we are second from the bottom.¹¹ Another indicator may be medical science's on-going "medical flip-flops." Eggs used to be considered an unhealthy food item but now for the average American their use is okay. Estrogen replacement used to be considered good medical care for the post-menopausal woman but now it is to be avoided if at possible. Beta-blockers as a class of cardiovascular medicines used to be considered harmful for the person in congestive heart failure but now are a mainstay of its treatment. There is value in medical science but it is dangerous for our society to continue to accept its "truth of the day" over the truths of the Bible.

Rx #3. Teach the truth even if that truth is controversial. *The teachings of Jesus were controversial. Sometimes his teachings were praised by everyone but sometimes people became so angry they ran him out of town.*

Rx #4. Lead. *Jesus teaches we are to be salt and light in a dark and troubled world. Our health care system is deeply troubled and it needs leadership based on truth. The church can influence society including the political system. It needs people to be reformers – people who will sacrificially be salt and light to lead the way.*

Preaching is the activity Matthew 9:35 refers to as "announcing the Good News of the Kingdom." "Good news" is a modern day term coming from an Old English word *godspell* and is related to another contemporary word "gospel." "Gospel" (*god*, good + *spell*, news) is derived from the Latin word *evangelium*.¹² In the Old Testament and in Greek literature *euangelion* was the word often used to report or proclaim victory in the battlefield.¹³ Jesus is that Good News and the accounts of his life from four different perspectives are contained in the first four books of the New Testament. Romans 1:1-5, 14-17 and John 3: 16-17 are summaries of that Good News. The kingdom refers to the "kingdom of heaven" or more commonly "the kingdom of God." According to Overman "kingdom of heaven" is a term unique to the gospel writer Matthew and the term has two connotations.¹⁴ In one sense it refers to a future state in that heaven is a reward for righteous living as in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5: 3, 10). In another sense, the "kingdom of heaven" refers to the here and now in what the church is to strive for and actually attain to varying degrees as in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 10).

Wilkinson and Edwards believe that preaching was the main reason Jesus came.¹⁵ In part their elevation of this activity over that of healing comes from their conclusions in the account of Jesus and the crowds as describes in both Luke 4:42-44 and Mark 1:35-39. In this account Jesus had been healing all the sick and demon possessed the night before and the next morning the crowds were looking for him again – presumably for their interest in him as a miracle worker. The disciples inform Jesus of the crowds at hand by actually interrupting Jesus during his morning prayer but Jesus does not go along with the disciple’s interest for him to get engaged again with the crowds. Mark 1:38-39 says, “But he replied, ‘We must go on to the other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too, because that is why I came.’ So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and expelling demons from many people.” While Wilkinson and Edwards conclude that when Jesus said, “because that is why I came,” it referred to his need or call to get back on track with his more important activity of preaching, it may also be reasonable to conclude Jesus was referring to his need and purpose to move on to other places. It is also interesting to note in Mark when Jesus said he was to go out to preach he ended up not only preaching but also healing. Jesus also expressed his intent of combing preaching and healing in the account of the beginning of his public ministry when he opened the scroll in the synagogue and read from Isaiah. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released and that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppression, and that the time of the Lord’s favor has come” (Luke 4:18-19).

Rx #5. Connect people to their creator. When a piece of equipment breaks down, we check with the manufacturer. When people break down, we need to check with

their manufacturer too. Preaching is a direct and purposeful way to connect people with their creator. One reason why this may be of interest to our society is that faith has the potential to significantly influence death and disease associated with or caused by lifestyle choices. About half of all deaths in America are due to such choices some of which involve smoking, eating, exercise, alcohol, and sexual behavior.¹⁶ According to a gallop poll 72% of people agreed with the statement, “My whole approach to life is based on my religion.”¹⁷ Building or maintaining hope is another reason to connect people with their maker. For example, many people endure such significant hardship in this life that their only hope of a better life and a better body is in the life hereafter. Sometimes this hope is the only thing that sustains them. Over the past century it has been challenging for the church to reconcile the activities of connecting people to their maker (i.e. evangelism) and social responsibility with an example of the later activity being health care for the poor. “Some churches effectively engage in many aspects of social action, but shy away from engaging in active evangelism. Similarly other churches develop elaborate evangelistic outreach, but commit limited resources to social action.”¹⁸ It is of interest that the author of this later article attempts to bridge this dichotomy by making a solid commitment to neighbor.

When theologians discuss the healing accounts of Jesus, they generally are referring to his physical healings, demon exorcism, and raising the dead.¹⁹ Jesus did heal people in other ways and one example involves the healing encounter he had with the woman at the well in John 4. For the sake of this discussion however, the healings of Jesus will refer to those former accounts. There are twelve unduplicated descriptions of healings of larger groups of people that seem to involve unspecified physical healing as well as demon exorcism. There are a total of twenty-six separate unduplicated healing of individuals or small groups. These accounts are composed of two blind men, a deaf man with a speech impediment, a blind man at Bethsaida, a bent over woman with an evil spirit, a man with swollen arms and legs, a group of ten lepers, a high priest’s servant with a slashed ear, a governmental official’s son with a fever, a paralyzed man at the pool of the Bethesda, a man born blind, a sick slave of a Roman officer, Peter’s mother-in-law with a fever, a man with leprosy, a paralyzed man, a man with a deformed hand, a woman with heavy vaginal bleeding, and two blind beggars. These are serious illnesses. Demon

possession was central in other accounts which include a man who couldn't speak, a man who couldn't speak or see, a man in the synagogue, a daughter of a Gentile woman, two men who lived in the cemetery, and a boy with seizures. People being raised from the dead included the son of a woman, Lazarus, and the daughter of a synagogue leader.

The gospels are the source of such healing accounts but when compared with teaching and preaching, such accounts represent a minority of the text. In the gospel of Mark, Wilkinson identifies fifty-five percent of the text concerned with teaching and twenty-five with healing. In Matthew, he identifies seventy-five percent devoted to teaching and nine percent to healing. Wilkinson admits such comparisons are rather crude but believes this is why many biblical scholars consider healing of lesser importance to teaching and preaching which are more extensively represented.²⁰

Theologians have offered a variety of reasons for why Jesus healed. Wilkinson however cautions us in our speculation on the psychology of Jesus for in less than half of the healing accounts is there an expressed indication of motive, and when it is expressed it is more often implicit than explicit.²¹ Compassion is what many people would regard as the main reason Jesus healed. Kelsy states the first and most important reason is that Jesus healed because “he cared about people and suffered when they did.”²² A review of scripture however discloses the compassion motive in only four of his healings.²³ Fulfilling the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament is identified as a motive in the situation where Jesus replies to the disciples of John the Baptist as in Luke 7:22. “Then he told John’s disciples, ‘Go back to John and tell him what you have seen and heard – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the

dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor.’’ Scripture fulfillment as motive is not meant ‘‘to imply that miracles were performed for the express purpose of fulfilling scripture... whatever the primary motive was for which they were performed, once they had been performed, they could be seen to fulfill the scripture prophecies concerning the Messiah.’’²⁴ Hare cites the healing miracles of Jesus directly connect to his teaching activity.²⁵ Hare concludes that Mark views the miraculous healing activities of Jesus as certifying his teaching (Mark 1:21-28) but believes Matthew views the teachings of Jesus make his miracles significant (Matthew 7:28-29).

While it is interesting to speculate as to why Jesus healed, it is perhaps of greater importance to consider why healing has come to have such a diminished presence in most churches today. Teaching and preaching occurs every Sunday. Restoring sight to the blind, mobility to the paralyzed, and function to the deformed does not. One reason may involve how Jesus chose to heal through miraculous events and modern man has a very difficult time connecting with miracles. ‘‘In our scientific culture, on the other hand, ‘‘miracles’’ are thought of as exceptional happenings in which the statistical odds of something occurring are improbable. Or else they are perceived of as events that stand in contradiction to general laws sustaining the universe.’’²⁶ At the time of Jesus however people had a different understanding of miracles. ‘‘In the first century A.D., the universe was perceived by people as an open universe; that is, God was thought of as dealing directly with the affairs of men in the natural order of life. They had no concept of observable laws by which the universe was sustained and ruled as we do today. Whenever such people saw an event not immediately explicable, they called it a ‘‘sign’’ of God and from them elicited awe and wonder.’’²⁷ Ludwig argues that many of the events the people of the first

century found inexplicable (for example, an eclipse of the sun or a catastrophe of nature) are now understandable today because of our advanced knowledge of the laws of nature that God also ordained. But for modern man, when something happens that is improbable or against the laws of nature, unless they experienced it themselves, some may tend to discount the event. Others may take the position that such “miracles” are the result of some natural force not yet understood.²⁸ Because man has been able to explain some of formerly held inexplicable events, many people have taken the position that man will someday be able to explain all inexplicable events. These people consider the world as a closed mechanical system and this line of thought “requires that human beings be understood within the system and that all human experience be explained by it.”²⁹ Kelsey suggests an alternate point of view in which there is a body of information, experience, or reality we do not know nor will ever know fully. Kelsey points to the work of the theologian Baron Friedrich von Hugel as being instrumental in opening his eyes to the possibility of a divine-human encounter. Kelsey goes on to attribute Carl Jung as the person who provided him a model for understanding the New Testament experience. In a letter to Kelsey, Jung wrote, “The real nature of the objects of human experience is still shrouded in darkness. The scientist cannot concede a higher intelligence to theology than to any other branch of human cognition. We know as little of a supreme being as of matter. But there is as little doubt of the existence of a supreme being as of matter. The world beyond is a reality, an experimental fact. We only do not understand it.”³⁰

Other reasons for the rise and fall of the healing practice in the church can be discerned by the historical review from the time of Jesus to now as is detailed the book, The Bible and Healing, by medical theologian John Wilkinson. In the period of time immediately following the life of

Jesus and the leaders of the apostolic church who were actively involved in healing, the healing ministry of the church was very comprehensive. “It comprised natural healing, both folk and professional, as well as healing through prayer and spiritual ministrations.”³¹ During this time churches started hospitals and infirmaries. Monasteries had herb gardens which were used to treat diseases and injuries. The staff of monasteries even visited the sick in their homes. In the Middle Ages however the leadership of the church began to forbid monks from practicing medical healing. For example, “in 1139, the Second Lateran Council forbade them to study medicine on the grounds that their proper function was the cure of souls and not to be physicians of bodies.”³² In 1163 the Council of Tours prohibited them from practicing surgery. As a result surgery developed through barbers which eventually led to the establishment of distinct medical and surgical professions no longer associated with the church. At the same time changes were occurring in the anointing of the sick for healing in that by the twelfth century this practice was now used primarily to prepare the person for death.

The practice of healing in the church never died out however. Healing was part of the ministry of George Fox (1642-1691) who is considered the founder of the Quakers. John Wesley (1703-1791) founder of Methodism practiced both medical and non-medical healing. For the modern church a renewed interest in healing can be traced in part to the medical missionary movement of the Protestant churches of the nineteenth century. This movement was primarily medical in nature. The other area of renewed interest came through the efforts of the church to reaffirm the teachings of the New Testament. This reaffirmation involved not only the healing accounts of Jesus but also the healing power of prayer as described in James 5:13-16 and healing as a gift of the Holy Spirit as described in I Corinthians 12: 9. These efforts were concerned with non-

medical healing. Dorothea Trudel (1810-1863) was one person who renewed the church's interest in non-medical healing. She first became involved when four of her employees who were not responding to medical treatment for their illness, were healed when she recalled James 5 and started praying at their bedside. She eventually opened a hospital and while she did not deny the value of doctors and medical treatments, she relied on prayer, the laying on of hands, and the anointing with oil. Another person was Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805-1880), a Lutheran pastor, and his son Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842-1919) of Germany. Despite opposition to his healing ministry from church leadership he eventually purchased a sanitarium which became a famous center of Christian healing throughout Europe and America. His method to healing involved only prayer. He "healed in the context of divine worship which included the proclamation of the healing word of God and prayer."³³ He also was not against doctors and medical treatments. The renewed healing ministry of the church in America can be traced to the Holiness Movement which is associated with Dr. Charles Cullis (1883-1892). He was an Episcopalian layman who qualified in medicine at the University of Vermont. He organized holiness conferences which contained the theme 'Faith Cures through Prayer'. Albert Benjamin Simpson (1843-1919), a Presbyterian minister, attended these conferences and eventually he formed The Christian and Missionary Alliance. This was the first denomination to emphasize spiritual healing as an important part of its ministry. Another person involved in the healing renewal was Andrew Murray, a prominent minister of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. For these men, Simpson and Murray, as well as Gordon (1836-1895), a Baptist minister and author of one of the earlier books on the healing ministry of the church, they never developed healing as the central focus of their ministry. For them, "the healing ministry was just a matter-of-fact addition to their everyday pastoral duties."³⁴ The idea of healing as a gift of the

Holy Spirit was advanced by the Pentecostal Movement which can be traced to the work of Rev. John Alexander Dowie (1847-1907). As a theological student he worked in an infirmary as a chaplain and became very disillusioned with the medical treatment of patients. He subsequently learned he had the gift of healing and then went on to form a variety of congregations and associations which utilized divine healing. Dowie was very much opposed to doctors and medical treatments. Most of the more recent interest in healing as described above came from individuals who were either not part of mainline churches or if they were part of mainline churches they were opposed by church leadership. As a result Wilkinson says a variety of healing associations that were either denominational or ecumenical in nature were formed. Examples include the Guild of Health of the Church of England and the Order of St. Luke the Physician. As a result of the success of these associations, mainline churches were challenged to respond. At this time almost every mainline church now has committees or guidelines that recognize the practice of healing in the context of the church. Application of this practice certainly does vary from denomination to denomination, and from church to church, but the healing role of the church is no longer denied.

Rx #6. Develop health and healing initiatives as major ministries of the church.

The church has a rich history in health and healing and with the current health care crisis looming on the horizon, now is the time to build upon that tradition. Over recent years health care has become so technical and so driven by business and government that it might be difficult for people to envision a major role for the church. Dr. Harold Koenig of Duke University does have a vision. At the 2002 national conference of the Christian Community Health Fellowship he began his address by describing our health care crisis as one that will create “world wide stress and havoc.”³⁵ He then went on to identify the growing specialty of parish nursing as one possible solution in which the religious community could be linked with our health care system. Also, Wayne Anthony and other strategic planners in health care reform are predicting a change from a plan-driven health care system to a participant driven-health care system.³⁶ In a plan-driven health care system which we have now, insurance companies call the shots and the individual has little control. In a participant-driven system, individual patients are much

more involved. In this later arrangement people of faith would more likely have the option of making their own health care choices in a manner consistent with their faith and perhaps in the context of their faith community.

Rx #7. Engage in the healing of all types of diseases – including the more serious ones and the ones not all that comfortable to deal. *Health care professionals seem to be reasonably effective in responding to most aspects of high blood pressure, infections, broken bones, or even cancer. The health care system as a whole however is not as well equipped to respond to other common diagnoses such as depression, alcoholism, chronic pain, and abuse. At some level we in the church must be actively and seriously engaged in healing people of any areas of brokenness in life.*

Rx #8. Be available for healing encounters at any time and in any circumstance. *Too often we as a people compartmentalize our lives and activities. Also far too often the misplaced priorities of our busy lives dull our sensitivity to the needs of others and drain us of any capacity to respond. Mark 1:38-39 describes a circumstance in which Jesus set out to preach but also ended up healing. Matthew 9:35 also says that wherever Jesus went he healed.*

Rx #9. View the methods of the modern day health professional as a use of the agents and compounds of God’s creation. *While it is expected to view the supernatural methods of healing as ordained of God, so are the natural methods of healing – both folk and professional. This later form of healing “occurs as the result of the healing processes of repair of the body and mind which God included in his creation of human beings, and the discovery and use of healing agents he placed in nature.”³⁷*

Rx #10. Include the supernatural methods in a healing ministry. *Just because it is not possible for man to confirm a clear scientific mechanism to the methods of prayer, the laying on of hands, the anointing of oil, and healing as a gift of the Spirit, we as a church are called to utilize them. Many people including modern-day researchers are beginning to testify on the effectiveness of such supernatural methods. Regardless of such support it is time to accept such methods on the basis of faith alone and realize that the created will never be able to fully explain the creator.*

Compassion and the Crowds

Jesus had great pity for the crowds. While the New Living Translation uses the words “great pity”, other translations like the New International Version and the New American Standard Bible use the word “compassion.” Compassion may be a more fitting word as pity seems to denote an attitude of inferiority of the one who is the object of that pity. “Compassion is something other than pity. Pity suggests distance, even a certain condescendence.”³⁸ The

American Heritage Dictionary defines pity as, “1.a. Sorrow or grief aroused by the misfortune of another; compassion for suffering. b. Concern or regret for one considered inferior or less favored; condescending sympathy.”³⁹ The synonym section of pity in this dictionary further distinguishes pity and compassion. “Pity implies a disposition to help but little emotional sharing of the distress. Compassion always favorably connotes broad or profound feeling for the misfortunes of others and a desire to aid them.” The Latin derivation of compassion is that of *com* which means together or with, and *pati* which means to suffer. In other words compassion means “to suffer with.”

Regardless of the word or phrases chosen in any of these translations, these words are derived from the Greek word *splanchnon*. This is the strongest word for pity in the Greek language.⁴⁰ In its plural form *splanchna*, this noun is used to denote “the inward parts or entrails (of a sacrificial animal), especially the more valuable parts: the heart, lungs, liver, spleen, and / or kidneys.”⁴¹ These parts were eaten as a sacrificial meal immediately after the killing of an animal. Over time the word came to include reference to additional inward parts of the body such as the male sexual organs, the womb, and the intestines. As the intestines were regarded as the origin of natural passions, “the word came to have the figurative meaning of heart (as the organ of feeling and emotions).”⁴² *Splanchnizomai* is the verb form and occurs only in the synoptic gospels. In Matthew 9:36 it describes Jesus’ reaction to the crowds who had great problems, did not know where to go for help, and were like sheep without a shepherd. In other gospel locations it is used to describe the emotional reaction of Jesus to seeing the needs of the sick in Matthew 14:14 (the crowds), Matthew 20:34 (two blind men) and Mark 1:41 (man with leprosy). This word is also used to describe his reaction to the crowds who were like sheep

without a shepherd in Mark 6:34, the widow who mourned the death of her only son in Luke 7:13, and the hungry crowds who had been with him for days in Matthew 15:32 or Mark 8: 2. Lastly it occurs in Mark 9:22 in the context of an appeal to Jesus from a father having a son possessed by a demon in Mark 9:22. *Splanchnizomai* communicates “sympathy, pity or compassion for a person in the deepest part of one’s being.”⁴³ When Jesus saw these people, he suffered himself in the deepest part of his being.

Jesus suffering as he heals is why he is often referred to as the wounded healer as illustrated in Matthew 8:16-17. “That evening many demon-possessed people were brought to Jesus. All the spirits fled when he commanded them to leave; and he healed all the sick. This fulfilled the word of the Lord through Isaiah, who said, ‘He took our sicknesses and removed our diseases.’” This particular prophecy refers to a passage found in Isaiah 53: 4 which says, “Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down.” An alternative translation says, “Yet it was our sicknesses he carried; it was our diseases that weighed him down.” Ludwig sites Roland Miller’s two possible explanations for this passage.⁴⁴ The first is “Jesus bore away our sickness by destroying the power of sin by His suffering and death. Golgotha thus illustrates how Jesus rescues humankind from both sin and sickness.”⁴⁵ The second more literal explanation refers to Jesus actually bearing “our sickness in His person...As He went about healing the sick and dealing with human infirmities, Jesus felt and bore the weight and sorrow of our illness just as He bore the weight and punishment of our sins.”⁴⁶ Ludwig admonishes the contemporary Christian healer “to focus on the theology of the cross rather than on a theology of glory. Much of the modern distortion of Christ’s healing ministry can be attributed to an over-enthusiasm for works of wonder He performed, incidentally, the same trap the Pharisees fell into

when they asked him to do a miracle. ...Those who follow Jesus must follow His healing path and really participate in the sorrows of the wounded. Healing exacts the price of pain to the person who is unafraid to touch both the inner and outer lives of the sick and ill.”⁴⁷

The object of the compassion of Jesus is the crowds who seemed to be with him often. Matthew 4:25 says, “Large crowds followed him wherever he went – people from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, from all over Judea, and from east of the Jordan River.” While some authors suggest the ethnic constitution of the crowds included the Gentiles, Cousland concludes the crowds were predominately of Jewish groups and represent the people of Israel and not their leaders.

Cousland feels that while Matthew has broken with the Jewish leadership, he has not broken his ties with the Jewish people and hopes for their conversion. The crowds were of the lower class – mostly artisans (craftsmen) and peasants. “They were largely illiterate, without social mobility and direct access to power, and because of these deficiencies they were attracted to Jesus’ promises of reformed societal relationships.”⁴⁸ In regard to the “great problems” of the crowds, Cousland contends the crowds were under two burdens. First is they were living under the burden of the Pharisaic interpretation of the Law and secondly under the burden of sin. “The people are weary and burdened with sin and sickness, a depiction that accords well with other descriptions of the crowds as scattered and helpless, plagued with numerous illnesses.”⁴⁹ The theological significance of the crowds has not been subject to careful study and their exact role may vary with the gospel author.⁵⁰ The crowds responded variably to Jesus and this may represent varying subgroups within the crowds or even variable responses within the same subgroups. Some were welcoming and enthusiastic but others offered strong opposition as in the crowd that arrests Jesus and the crowd that condemns him to death.

The crowds are also described as not knowing where to go for help and being without a leader. Cousland believes Matthew's use of the image of the lost sheep without a shepherd in Matthew 9:36 is connected with the "lost sheep of Israel" in Matthew 10:6, 15:24, and Ezekiel. "He (Matthew) consciously associates them with the House of Israel, who like, the people of Israel of old, suffer from deficient or malign leadership."⁵¹

Then this message came to me from the Lord: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel. Give them this message from the Sovereign Lord: Destruction is certain for you shepherds who feed yourselves instead of your flocks. Shouldn't shepherds feed their sheep? You drink the water, wear the wool, and butcher the best animals, but you let your flocks starve. You have not taken care of the weak. You have not tended the sick or bound up the broken bones. You have not gone looking for those who have wandered away and are lost. Instead you have ruled them with force and cruelty. So my sheep have been scattered without a shepherd. They are easy prey for any animal. They have wandered through the mountains and hills, across the face of the earth, yet no one has gone to search for them." (Ezekiel 34:1-6)

Rx #11. Take on the compassionate nature of Christ. Suffer with people.

Compassion is a necessary attitude for effective healing. "First of all, healing demands compassion not curiosity; it [healing] demands action not discussion."⁵² By making it a priority to connect with the inner person of the sick, to suffer with them in their pain and illness, we as healers are better able to understand the basis and impact of their illness. Perhaps this attitude in the healer will give rise to an attitude in the patient that is more receptive to the healers methods.

Rx #12. Design every ministry – including the health and healing ministry as welcoming to the poor and weary. *One major flaw of our current health care system is that for a variety of reasons many of the poor do not have reasonable access to care. In many cases this holds true for other services of society and ministries of the church as well.*

Rx #13. Realize that "not knowing where to go for help" is not limited to the poor and weary. *Many people are looking for help but often in all the wrong places. People look to alcohol to dull the pain and turmoil of life. People also look to technology in a similar manner. Antidepressants are becoming the preferred way of dealing with guilt, sadness, and broken relationships. Many with type 2 diabetes are choosing more*

and more expensive medications as the preferred means of dealing with the consequences of their habits of overeating and relative physical inactivity.

Rx #14. Be a shepherd. *Being a shepherd implies care, concern, and responsibility for a group of people. It implies leadership and active guidance as the shepherd walked ahead of his flock and occasionally used his staff to redirect wayward sheep.*

The Harvest

In agriculture harvest refers to the process of gathering ripened crops, the crop thus gathered, or the time of such gathering. In the Old and New Testaments the harvest metaphor is used to convey a variety of messages but in general it is used to describe the results of a prior action or actions –whether good or bad.⁵³ For example, the psalmist writes, “Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy. They weep as they go to plant their seed, but they sing as they return with their harvest” (Psalms 126:5-6). Another example is “Those who plant seeds of injustice will harvest disaster, and their reign of terror will end” (Proverbs 22:8). In Matthew 9:37-38 and other related passages in the gospels, the harvest metaphor refers to conversion - the process or time of bringing people to eternal life.⁵⁴ “Predisposed by God for reception of the gospel, humans are likened to a crop of fully ripened grain ready for harvest.”⁵⁵ John 4:36 says, “The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life.”

The first description of the harvest in Matthew 9:37-38 is that it is “so great.” Greatness may refer to the joyous event involving the faith conversion of any one person. Greatness may also refer to the significant challenge commonly associated with the process of faith conversion. More likely greatness implies abundance in number of those converted. Even the image of the fields compels one to envision numbers too many to count. In the previous verse (Matthew 9:36), Jesus is responding to the crowds which by definition imply a large number of people.

Matthew 8:1 refers to “large crowds of people followed Jesus as he came down the mountainside.” Later in that same chapter the miracle of the five loaves and two fish involves five thousand men and additional women and children. “Vast fields are ripening” are descriptive of the harvest in John 4:35-36, and “many of the Samaritans believed” in John 4:39. It is important to consider that many does not mean all and may not even imply most. Despite all the miraculous signs he had done, most of the people did not believe in him (John 12:37). Luke 10 describes Jesus sending out the seventy-two in a manner similar to sending out the twelve in Matthew 9 and 10. While Luke does not comment in terms of numbers harvested, he Bock indicates the disciples were to anticipate a large harvest.⁵⁶ Scripture states the seventy-two disciples returned with excitement. “When the seventy-two returned, they joyfully reported to him, ‘Even the demons obey us when we use your name’” (Luke 10:17). Jesus was even made happy (Luke 10:21). There was no disappointment, nor was there the offering up of excuses for a less than successful result. The disciples followed the instructions of Jesus. They preached and they healed.

The harvest is next described as having a task-worker mismatch. Few workers are on hand for the task which is enormous in size, scope, and other challenges. This description of few workers should not be unexpected however for this is the beginning of the Christian ministry. In Matthew 9:38, Jesus tells his disciples they are to respond to this challenge in prayer for more workers. The disciples are not only to bring people to believe in the Savior, but they also are to secure people who will go out themselves and bring others to the Savior. With conversion there is expansion of the pool of laborers who are also ready to share the good news with others.⁵⁷ Another perspective on the charge for prayer for more workers is that the “more workers” may

be the disciples themselves. The content of Matthew prior to the end of the ninth chapter is about Jesus doing the work with the disciples in an observatory role whereas the beginning of chapter ten is about the twelve going out to do the work he has taught them. “The full significance of 9:37-38 is now evident. First of all, Jesus has made it clear to his disciples that he is not to complete his ministry to the crowds single-handedly. Rather, his ministry is one which calls for additional laborers. Secondly, he has for the first time in the story called his disciples to take specific and crucial action in regard to his ministry. The ministry which previously was Jesus’ concern alone has now become the concern of his disciples as well.”⁵⁸

While not directly expressed in Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus assigns in the gospel of John an element of urgency to the harvest. “Do you think the work of harvesting will not begin until the summer ends four months from now? Look around you! Vast fields are ripening all around us and are now ready for the harvest” (John 4:35-36). The meaning of the phrase “the harvest not beginning until the summer ends four months from now” likely refers to a local, village proverb shared orally at the time and no longer recognized. However, it was commonly understood that in the time between planting and harvesting, the farmer can relax and anticipate the plenty of harvest. Jesus wants to replace the attitude of complacency, with an attitude of urgency.⁵⁹

As one considers this element of urgency, one must also wonder why the fields are ripening now as described in John 4:35. Part of the answer to this question may involve identifying the planter who is now included as a character in the harvest metaphor of John 4 and is specifically distinguished from the harvester. “You know the saying, ‘One person plants and someone else harvests.’ And it’s true. I sent you out to harvest where you didn’t plant; others had already

done the work, and you will gather the harvest” (John 4:36-38). Who is the planter and who are the “others” who had already done the work? Morris indicates the meaning of “others” is not clear.⁶⁰ He includes a list of speculations to include the prophets of old, John the Baptist and his followers, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, or maybe Jesus himself if one were to regard the plural of “others” as not meant to be significant. Rudolf Schnackenburg acknowledges the difficulty in discerning the more concrete meaning of this part of the metaphor and his list of speculations adds the others may be Jesus and the Father.⁶¹ Schnackenburg concludes by saying regardless of the difficulty in ascertaining the specific identity of the “others”, the metaphor is still helpful in understanding the work of the missionary. “All missionary work is the unbroken continuity with the mission and work of Jesus, and every missionary builds on the labors of his predecessors.”⁶² In this conclusion Schnackenburg seems to blend the meaning of the harvest metaphor as used in Matthew and John (i.e. people are ready for harvesting now) with the meaning of the harvest metaphor as used by contemporary evangelists. Such later evangelists frequently view their initial work as cultivation in terms of developing relationships with people, next as sowing the seed, and then finally as harvesting as they make a personal commitment to Christ. This situation is consistent with one definition of the evangelistic process as, “...the process (usually prolonged) of guiding an unbeliever, in the power of the Spirit, in making the multitude of mini-decisions that result in the overcoming of many obstacles, toward placing his/her faith in Christ.”⁶³ This use of the harvest metaphor describes an ongoing process over an indeterminate period of time in which a variety of people may be involved in bringing people to faith in Christ. This later understanding of harvesting facilitates the development of an attitude of complacency – the very attitude Jesus sought to avoid.

Other support for the ripeness of the harvest now is found in the observation that the harvest is declared ripe in places Jesus and his disciples had not yet gone to cultivate the relationship or plant the seed as many modern day evangelists would say. “The Lord now chose seventy-two other disciples and sent them on ahead in pairs to all the towns and villages he planned to visit. These were his instructions to them: ‘The harvest is so great, but the workers are so few. Pray to the Lord who is charge of the harvest, and ask him to send more workers for his fields’” (Luke 10:1-2). In the fourth chapter of John Jesus has been talking with the Samaritan woman at the well who then runs to tell others in her village of her experience. Jesus then turns to his disciples and says, “Vast fields are ripening all around us and are ready now for the harvest” (John 4:35). This was his description of the fields before the villagers came out to see him and before he spent those two days with them.

Developing a deeper understanding of the complex harvest metaphor is further facilitated in the gospel of John. “Then Jesus explained: ‘My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work’” (John 4:34-35). While committed to completing his work, Jesus was also troubled by the work he had been asked to do by the Father.

The time has come for the Son of Man to enter into his glory. The truth is, a kernel of wheat must be planted in the soil. Unless it dies it will be alone – a single seed. But its death will produce many new kernels – a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who despise their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. All those who want to be my disciples must come and follow me, because my servants must be where I am. And if they follow me, the Father will honor them. Now my soul is deeply troubled. Should I pray, ‘Father, save me from what lies ahead’? But this is the very reason why I came. (John 12: 23-27)

This later passage seems to support the conclusion that Jesus is the seed (the kernel of wheat planted in the soil), God the Father is the planter, and the disciples are the harvesters. God the

Father and Jesus the Son are in the process of doing the work of redemption and salvation.

While the disciples of Jesus have a critical role to play in harvesting, the real work of salvation and redemption is about to be done on the cross. It may be for this very reason that at this time in the history of mankind Jesus declares the fields ripe for the harvesting.

Rx #15. Realize the harvest is ripe now and needs to be brought in with a sense of urgency. God has planted the seed. The crop has grown. Christ has declared it ripe. It is up to us as harvesters to bring it in before it dies in the field.

Rx #16. Understand that teaching, preaching, and healing are the tools of the harvest. Use all three and use them in the context of each other. Teaching, preaching, and healing represent the whole of the ministry of Jesus Christ. This is what he modeled and that is what he taught. As we are called to be like Christ, that is what we must do as well.

Rx #17. Address the challenge of the worker shortage through prayer for more workers – not by having workers alter their use of the harvest tools. The numbers of people before Jesus and his disciples were huge. Many also had great need. Neither Jesus nor his disciples responded to that immense challenge by altering their work or their use of the harvest tools. They used all three. Similarly the number of people before us and their respective need is also great. If we are to model the work of Jesus and his disciples, we too are not to alter our use of the harvest tools by just focusing on the use of one or two tools.

Rx #18. Anticipate a large harvest. In quantity what is brought in may not represent the most of those in the fields. It will also not be meager as is all too common in much of the work of the church today. We have to believe it will be many.

Rx #19. Rejoice not just in the greatness of ministry results but rejoice in being a child of God and doing his will. When the seventy-two disciples returned with joy from their journey of preaching and healing, Jesus cautions them. “But don’t rejoice just because evil spirits obey you; rejoice because your names are registered as citizens of heaven” (Luke 10: 20).

Rx #20. Appreciate that God is in charge of the harvest. We are not. While we definitely are responsible for an important task in the harvest, we are not responsible for the harvest. That responsibility belongs to the Lord.

Rx #21. Yoke yourself with Jesus. When we engage in the work of Christ we are to identify and connect with him. “Anyone who welcomes you is welcoming me, and anyone who welcomes me is welcoming the Father who sent me” (Matthew 10:40). “Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle, and you

will find rest for your soul. For my yoke fits perfectly, and the burden I give you is light” (Matthew 11:29-30). Perhaps the reason many health ministries of the church have had such limited impact is they have avoided the use of his name. Let us not continue to make this same mistake as we seek to better understand and carry out his work.

Combining teaching, preaching, and healing in the context of each other is definitely difficult work. It is a challenge of equal or greater difficulty to the task as first described of the clinic patient by the name of Judy, a woman with great need having multiple problems but few resources to help. Mother Teresa gives a more contemporary example of her ways and the source of her strength for carrying out such challenging work in the following quote: “Pray for me that I not loosen my grip on the hands of Jesus even under the guise of ministering to the poor.”⁶⁴ Mother Teresa also says, “The miracle is not that we do this work but that we are happy to do it.”⁶⁵ When the church is ready to put one hand in the hand of Jesus, the other in the hand of their neighbor in great need, *and* do it with joy, it may then be up to the task of combining teaching, preaching, and healing throughout its ministries. Perhaps this will then usher in a level of renewal the modern church has not seen – a level of renewal that will bring a bit of his kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven.

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