

Is Inner Healing Biblical?

By Dan MacKinnon

I recently found myself having to answer the protest that inner healing is not Biblical. While what follows was intended for a particular audience, I thought there might be others who have the same questions and for them I offer this simple response. It is not intended to be an exhaustive answer, but to at least highlight something of what the Bible teaches about healing.

The Case for Inner Healing:

I will try to give a brief understanding of both healing and inner healing but it should be understood that grasping the topic fully requires a well-developed theology of sin and its impact on humanity, a Biblical theology of suffering, a theology of miracles and the supernatural, and an understanding of what Biblical spirituality is; none of which am I going to attempt. I will simply try to boil what I can down as briefly as I can.

The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology defines “heal,” “healing” as:

“The restoration of health (Ps. 41:3), the making whole or well whether physically, mentally, or spiritually. The Bible indicates that God’s highest will for man is for him to enjoy good health (“even as your soul is getting along well” 3 John 2). Healing is a prominent topic in the Bible. Sickness is cured by the supernatural intervention of God with or without the use of earthly means. God himself proclaimed, “I am the Lord who heals you!” (Exodus 15:26)”¹

In the Old Testament, the word most often used for “healing” is “rapha” meaning to heal, mend, or make whole. In the New Testament two words are used, “therapeuo,” meaning “healing” or “cure” from the root word, which means “to attend or be present” as in medically and the word from which we get “therapy.” The second word is “iaomai,” meaning to “heal” or “make whole.” In reading the Bible, it is impossible to conclude that God has no interest in healing.

The question, it would seem, is “What kind of healing is Biblical?”

Defining Healing:

I can’t define it any better than the words in Scripture: “to heal, cure, or make whole.” For any question of whether healing is in the Bible, do a simple search in your concordance and you’ll get the answer.

So then the question becomes, “What kind of healing do we find in the Bible?” Again, a simple search of your concordance will quickly tell you that clearly God heals human bodies of sickness, disease, and injury, etc. (Cf. Genesis 20:17; I Kings 17:22-23; Psalm 103:3; Mark 4:23, Acts 3:16).

We often say that the greatest healing of all is the healing of the soul by which we receive salvation and become new creations by faith in Christ (Cf. 2 Chronicles 7:14; Isaiah 6:10, 53:5; Jeremiah 33:6; 2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 Peter 2:24). We can safely call that spiritual healing, but is that all there is?

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Is it possible that God might be interested in healing something different than our bodies and our souls, although His healing certainly includes these?

As Christians, what do we do for those suffering from things like depression, self-destructive thoughts/life patterns, addiction, or those whose experiences of life no longer permit them to trust people? What can believers say to people who have been raped, abused, neglected and bear the indelible marks in their lives of such experiences? There may be no physical wounds, but does it mean people feel no pain? What hope can we offer to those who live with the memory of things they have done in the past that haunt them in the present? What do we say to those who suffer from rage, anger, and bitterness? If God is only interested in our bodies and our souls, then we have nothing to offer a world that lives in the reality of such experiences. Do we do the mental and emotional equivalent of James 2:16 and tell them “go on their way and be blessed” as we do nothing for them? Or even worse, do we admit that the Gospel of Jesus Christ has no answers for broken hearts and minds and send them off to the world’s counselors to be “healed?” Does the Gospel have anything to offer the soldiers who return from military conflict with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or is that just a contrived modern concession on which the Church can turn its back? What do we do with the numerous accounts of people who were demonized and set free by Jesus and the disciples? Where do they fit? Regardless of Carl Jung, Freud, and others’ conclusions, does the Bible admit that people can suffer in a way that is neither physical nor spiritual?

The Biblical Testimony:

I can think of no better example of a case for inner healing than in 2 Samuel 13, where after Tamar has been raped by her half brother Amnon, she is then doubly victimized by Absalom, whose advice is “Don’t take this to heart.” In other words, “Get over it!” The Scripture records the outcome of such advice for our benefit in vs. 20: “And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.” Surely it is recorded, like many other stories in Scripture, to help us see a better way. It seems to me that Scripture is illustrating that those who practice, “Get over it!” receive a life sentence of “desolation.” The advice of many in the church to “Get over it!” denies the wounds people carry emotionally and mentally and does a disservice to the Gospel that sets people free. To borrow terms from modern psychology, Scripture tells us how “dysfunctional” David’s household was, and it was dysfunctional long before anybody came up with the term in psychology. Why are there such accounts in Scripture? Is it simply to air their dirty laundry before the eyes of the world and shame them? Why do you suppose that Scripture tells us how disastrous polygamous relationships are, such as Jacob’s? Is it just to be an anecdote about sinful hearts? Surely what we know of the grace, mercy and love of God from His Word is that God has larger purposes in mind for us than a public shaming.

Are there accounts of “inner healing” in Scripture? You will never find the words “inner healing” in Scripture, but you see evidence of it everywhere.

In Genesis 50:15-21, you see the power of forgiveness to rebuild (make whole) broken relationships as Joseph extends grace to his brothers. Joseph would have been justified in the eyes of the world to exact vengeance on them, but the lessons of grace were not lost on him. They were, however, learned through him by his brothers and all who would subsequently read the story. *God is interested in healthy relationships.*

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In Exodus 3, when God calls Moses and then endures his endless sidestepping with questions, it seems to me that God is actually working with Moses to resolve his past so he can be effective in the present. Moses had been practicing hiding as an answer to his life's problems and God practiced disclosure, as He always does. Is God interested in the resolution of our past issues so that we can be effective in the present? Yes, and that is inner healing. It seems to me that God is interested in anything that moves us forward. *God is interested in healthy inner lives.*

In Matthew 8, we read:

“When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and knelt before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” He said. “Be clean!”

What's going on here? Jesus on many occasions healed people without touching them, including lepers, so why did He use touch here? Maybe because leprosy was not only a life-threatening disease, but also a relationship-killing and heart-destroying affliction. Not only did a leper suffer the effects of the disease ravaging his body, but he also suffered the isolation from his community and humiliation afresh every time he met a “clean” person to whom he was to shout “Unclean!” simply so he/she could avoid him. Is it possible that Jesus' touch was as healing to the heart as His words were to the body of a person who had not known human touch for years? That is inner healing. If this is even remotely true, then we should embrace such a ministry of caring that brings such inner healing. *God is interested in healthy hearts.*

When Jesus stands before the disciples in John 20 and confronts Thomas' doubts, is this simply a head issue or is it possible that there might be some other issues of the heart also being addressed? When He stands in the midst of the disciples in the same chapter and says, “Peace be with you!” was this addressing their physical bodies, their souls, their fragile hearts, or something that included all of these? *God is interested in conquering our fears.*

In John 21, when Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves Him, is this just an exercise in loyalty or is Jesus with the frequency of the repeated question walking Peter through the healing of his own betraying heart? Is that not an inner healing? *God is interested in healing our lives and failures.*

My understanding of inner healing is this: For me, inner healing has to do with addressing places of woundedness and brokenness in our lives out of which have sprung lies and un(half)truths we have believed about ourselves, others and God. These lies have resulted in the employment of coping mechanisms, called dysfunctional behaviors, used to dull pain, all of which lead to distorted lives. In truth, they keep us from enjoying the full life Jesus came to give (John 10:10). Is God interested in us living undistorted lives?

When the truth of the whole Gospel – not a truncated, cerebral version – is applied to the real life situations of brokenness, we see new life growing out of the ruins. When broken people encounter the hope and healing of the Gospel, new life rises from the rubble. When the risen Christ touches places long dead inside people, they come to life. That, it seems to me, is part of the mandate of Jesus' ministry and therefore ours, and it has to do with inner healing (Isaiah 61:1-4, Luke 9:2-6). When we tell people that God has no answer for the emotional and mental

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pain of their lives, what is communicated of the Gospel and the power of God?

What is heaven, except a place where body, mind and soul are fully set free (Revelation 21:4). If God is not interested in healing broken hearts and minds, why does He wipe away tears?

Sin lies at the root, either sins we have committed or sins that have been committed against us. Does the Bible want to address sin and its destructive power in our lives, or gloss over it? Nowhere in Scripture does sin get a free pass and nowhere do you hear God say, “Suck it up Princess and get over it!” Yet saying that inner healing is unbiblical does exactly that. It says that the need for healing is not real because we don’t think wounds are real. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I think that is the height of arrogance.

Does inner healing sometimes involve dealing with memories? Yes, but what is a memory except a real event from our past? We’re not interested in contrived memories or contrived healing, but we are interested in allowing God to rebuild the ruins in our lives. If you think God is not interested in our memory, ask yourself how many times He invites us to “remember” our own story for our continuing growth and renewal (see the Passover, the great festivals of Israel, their songs as in Deuteronomy 31:19 and the Lord’s Supper). God has a keen interest in our memories. If God is the God of all time, He can not only help us deal with the things of the past that keep us from being made whole (rapha) in the present, but He can also meet us in our past as well as our present. That’s exactly what He did with Peter. Time is nothing to God.

What do we say to those who say, “I’ve got no issues from my past?” My answer is, “God bless you. You’re one of the fortunate few!”

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, as trumpeted from Scripture, is a healing Gospel. It points us to the power of God to heal broken relationships with Him, and as a result those forgiven become ministers of reconciliation in the world. Scripture clearly shows us the power of sin in unhealthy relationships (Cf, Jacob and his wives and children, David and his family, the struggles in the Corinthian church, the persecution of the Church both in Biblical times and since). The point is that we can learn to be healthy ourselves and promote healthy relationships around us. He takes the weak things of this world to show the power of His strength (1 Corinthians 1:27-30). To me, that is the beauty of the Christian community – when we understand our mandate from Jesus. In a world that follows unhealthy models for relationships, the Church can demonstrate the power of healthy ones.

Is God interested in broken hearts and minds? Let Him speak for Himself:

*“The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”
(Psalm 34:18)*

“He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” (Psalm 147:3)

“Heal me, Lord, and I will be healed; save me and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise.” (Jeremiah 17:14)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28)

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Has God changed, or is He still Jehovah Rapha, “I am the Lord who heals!” as in Ex. 15:26? To put limits on what God heals seems to me to be more contrived than anything modern psychology or ancient spiritual practice could ever do. Let God speak for Himself in His Word. Forgiveness, at the heart of the Gospel, is the ultimate inner healing. To limit what God wants to address, be it in inner or outer healing, or in sanctification or in conviction of sin is to act as God ourselves, and I should think this is an affront to God Himself.

To those who say inner healing is unbiblical, I’ll let Jesus speak:

“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.’”

Our Response:

Isaiah 61:1-4

“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for 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, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.”

Notes:

¹ The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology: Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1984. pg. 539

About the Author

Dan MacKinnon currently serves as Lead Pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Orleans, Ontario, Canada and has served in three pastoral charges: in Englehart and Tomstown, in the Kawarthas, and in Toronto. He has been a conference speaker and worship leader for various Presbyterian Renewal Ministry International events. He has served as a board member for various missions, has been a mentor and field education supervisor for students at Bible College and Seminary, and has taught at Tyndale University College. Most recently, he has served as a mentor within the Pastors of Excellence Program at Ashland Theological Seminary in Ohio. He has also served on both the planning and ministry teams for The Outpouring and Infilling conferences. Dan has been married to Dawn for more than 26 years, and they are the proud parents of three children who are their joy and delight. Dan lives with a deep sense of gratitude to God for the saving grace extended to him by our Great Savior.