

"Prayer ministry is meeting the needs of others with the resources of God", John Wimber

How do we pray for those who are ill?
How do we start?
How do we stop?
What do we say?
What do we do?

How should we pray? The disciples asked this question of Jesus. His reply was couched in the words of the Lord's prayer and some parables. Jesus also ministered to people who were sick, demonised, dead, hungry, lost, lonely and his ministry is characterised by its power, certainty, brevity and compassion.



Sometimes our temptation is to think that we can turn prayer ministry into a sort of magic spell – if we just do thus and so in this order we will be able to make this person better. But as Wimber reminds us, it isn't about us it's about Him and His power. Nevertheless, as human beings when we are faced with the needy person, most of us need a clue as to how to proceed in prayer ministry.

There are several models we find helpful to give us a start, a structure and a way of knowing how to stop! The main one, the starting point, is the Five Step Healing Model: this is the overarching model we use to frame our approach to most times of prayer and ministry. It provides a structure within which we can hear and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

THE FIVE STEP HEALING MODEL

This is for use in any environment in which you may find yourself praying for the sick. At church, at work, on the street.

Some hints

If possible find somewhere a little private or quieter. It protects people from potential embarrassment and also allows them to share and talk more than they might otherwise do.

In large gatherings be sensitive to people's need for privacy and their dignity.

Avoid the temptation to advise or preach or quote scripture. It is quite possible that the person you are praying for has had their fill of advice and they simply need the touch of the Holy Spirit. We have a tendency to talk in order to avoid praying.

Avoid the temptation to make the person feel good about themselves by reminding God how worthy they are of being healed. Our worthiness is irrelevant, thank goodness.

This is not just for leaders and pastors. Everyone gets to play. We are all ministers of his grace and we are all commissioned to pray for healing.

Use tongues. When you are unsure of how to pray or are waiting for the Lord to speak to you, pray in tongues. This is a gift given to help us pray – the Holy Spirit gives us words in a different language and we articulate our cry to God from a deep spiritual part of our being.

Often this is helpful in then being able to hear what God wishes us to do next. You don't have to speak in tongues to heal the sick, but it certainly helps.

Touch is often important although not necessary. Ask the person if you can put your hand on their body near the physical condition. With appropriate precautions when praying for women. Asking another woman to put their hands there, for example. Take care where people have been the victims of abuse, sometimes physical touch is a very negative thing for them.

Remember that praying for healing is a Kingdom activity. We are asking God to come, to let his Kingdom come. That means pushing back the territory of the enemy by bringing health and wholeness where there is hurt and disease. Only he can do that, all we are doing is asking him to do so or joining in with what he is already doing.

Step out in faith. Wimber used to spell faith, r-i-s-k. Take the risk and faith will come.

The 5 steps are linked to 5 questions we ask when we step out to pray for the sick:

Where does it hurt?

Why is this person ill or in pain?

What kind of prayer is needed here?

How effective are our prayers?

What should they do to keep their healing? What should they do if they have not been healed?

Step One: The Interview

Question: Where does it hurt? Listen on two levels: the natural and the supernatural.

In the natural – from my experience and knowledge of the bible, what do I think is wrong here? Not a medical diagnosis. Doctors need those for medicine but not for healing prayer. Ask enough questions of the person to know where it hurts.

In the supernatural – has the Lord given a word of knowledge, wisdom or discernment of spirits to understand what is the problem or to draw attention to someone or something?

Step Two: The diagnostic decision

Question: Why is this person ill or in pain? What has caused this? Again, we rely on the supernatural to discern the root of the problem.

If the person knows what the real issue is then the Holy Spirit will confirm that in our mind. If not then we ask him to reveal this.

What the person says is usually correct in that it is what they think the problem is. But very often God will give you more or deeper information to help understand what is going on.

The presenting problem is very often a symptom not a cause. Physical problems can be caused by emotional damage. And emotional damage can be caused by physical illness. Or an emotional problem may be caused by a demonic attachment. Or any combination.

Things to look out for are emotional traumas in the past that leave people with bitterness and anger. In these situations, forgiveness and repentance may be needed before healing can come.

Similarly accidents and abuse can lead to opportunities for people to become demonised. You need supernatural discernment to know this – and then once the demon is dealt with you can proceed with physical or emotional healing.

Another area to listen out for is what the doctors may have said in the past. Doctors have to make clinical assessments and speak truthfully with their patients. Nevertheless there are occasions when the words they speak carry extra-ordinary power and have an effect a bit like a curse on the patient. "This is incurable"
"The chances of re-occurrence are 50/50"

Over time, as you pray for those who are ill and as you study Jesus doing the same you do gain some experience and understanding of these sometimes complex issues.

Nevertheless, primarily, it is the Holy Spirit speaking to us as we pray, in words of knowledge, wisdom, discernment of spirits, guiding us to understand the real issue for which we need to pray.

This is an important part of healing prayer because it dictates what sort of prayer you are going to adopt at the next step.

Step Three: The Prayer Selection

Question, "What kind of prayer is needed here?" A deeper question is perhaps, "What does God want to do for this person at this time?"

Just because I am there asking doesn't mean that is what he wants to do right now. But we are ministers of his word, we are commissioned to speak the word of truth and that includes the declaration of healing to the sick and freedom to the demonised.

The fact that I am here asking probably means that the Lord wants to heal and has organised this to happen. Part of what is going on is that the Holy Spirit has raised some faith and expectation in my heart that I could pray for this person for healing. And he may well be doing the same in that person's heart right now too. Look for others around you, where is there faith in the room?

If we are being prompted by the Holy Spirit to pray we are in receipt of what we may call an anointing for healing prayer at that specific moment. And this is where the promise comes,

How bold and free we then become in his presence, freely asking according to his will, sure that he's listening. I John 5:14

The healing prayer usually falls into one of two categories:

Prayer directed to God (petition)

This is the most common way in which you will probably find your self praying. The simplest form is, "Lord, please heal Fred of his condition."

Equally valid, and perhaps more effective, is for the person for whom you are praying to ask for healing. This means that they know you didn't do it and raises faith in their hearts. If they declare lack of faith it provides you with an opportunity to encourage and instruct them about God's desire to heal.

Words from God (revelation)

This is where we speak words given to us by God, not to God.

- Command: you may feel an increase in faith and find yourself saying, "Be healed in Jesus' name." Often accompanied by other manifestations that indicate God is at work – warm hands, a tingling sensation, oil or water on your hands, a rush of heat, a conviction of faith.
- You may speak to the condition itself, the actual body say. Or you may speak to an evil spirit that is causing the illness. You may say, "I break your power over this person in Jesus' name." Or, even shorter, "Stop it".
- This may not sound like prayer but if you read accounts of Jesus' healing, you will see that he did this a lot.
- Pronouncement: this is similar to a command but comes after the healing. Usually accompanied by a sense of peace, the job is done, the battle is over. You can say, "The Lord is healing you right now" Or "the Lord has healed you" or "the Lord will heal this condition in 6 days time."
- Prayer of rebuke: Again similar to a word of command. You discern that an evil spirit is the cause of the complaint and you pray, "In the name of Jesus, I rebuke you, evil spirit. You have no right over this person's life. Go."

- Prayer of agreement: this is where you and the person or another agree in the sense that you have become aware of what the Lord is doing and agree about that together. So you pray, "Lord, we agree together and bless what you are doing in healing, delivering this person."

Or you may agree a course of action together too.

As you make the prayer selection you continue to listen to the Lord and seek his ongoing direction and counsel as you pray.

Step Four: Prayer Engagement

Question: How effective are our prayers? We have decided how to pray and now we need to engage with prayer.

Ask the person to adopt a comfortable position. Encourage them to close their eyes (more for your benefit than theirs really) and to hold open their hands in an attitude of receiving. This is not crucial, but helpful.

Except when you need to perhaps concentrate a little on what the Lord is saying and want to avoid distractions, keep your eyes open so that you can see what happens.

Ask the Holy Spirit to come. You may say, "Holy Spirit come." Or, "Holy Spirit come with your healing power" or "Holy Spirit come and show us how to pray." Thank the Lord for His power and presence, "We thank you for Your healing power".

Phenomenological responses

Often people will react to the presence of the Holy Spirit. Think of it like the branches on a tree waving in the wind. You can't see the wind but you can see the effect it has.

Sometimes the effect of the presence of the Holy Spirit is quite subtle: a fluttering of the eyelids, a flush to the face, a change in breathing pattern. An awareness of heaviness in the air.

If you see these you know God is around and at work and so you should pray, "More Lord, I bless what you are doing."

If there is hurt or sin or the memory of pain or abuse then one may see more extreme reactions. This is not surprising because profound and fundamental changes are sometimes happening in people where there is illness and damage.

Most of the responses you see are reported in the bible in various ways and are evidences of God at work in people's lives.

- Shaking & trembling
- Sometimes gentle trembling and associated with an infilling of the Holy Spirit and accompanied by a sense of peace and joy;
- Sometimes more violent and prolonged and associated with healing of serious hurt, deep emotional damage, or the encounter of the Holy Spirit with unrepentant sin or perhaps an evil spirit.
- Falling over (being slain)
- This is usually accompanied by a sense of calm and peace although typically not much happens unless it is for a very long period and perhaps accompanied by shaking. If the person can be encouraged to sit down instead of falling over that is helpful because it is easier to talk with them and continue to pray.
- Drunkenness
- A sense of euphoria that often comes with the first time experience of the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The person's body behaves like that of someone who is drunk, unable to walk or talk properly. Bodily writhing and distortions

- Pogoing, contracting limbs or facial expressions.
- Often indicate that there is a spiritual battle over sin.
- When violent and accompanied by sounds can be an indicator of demonisation.
- Laughing and sobbing – can sometimes happen over an extended period, even months.
- They indicate an awareness of God's holiness or grace.
- Prolonged praise – which can go on for hours and is often associated with receiving the gift of tongues and results in a vastly improved prayer life.

It is important to recognise that we do not seek external manifestations. What is going on inside is much more important than what we see outside. Sometimes nothing much happens, or seems to happen, and yet God will be at work in people's hearts and minds.

Nevertheless, it is worth understanding or at least being aware of the external response so that we can better minister to those who need healing.

We don't pray for physical manifestations, we pray for the Holy Spirit to come.

Talk

After praying for a while ask the person what is going on. You may say, "Is anything happening?" or "What's happening?" or "Do you sense the Lord's presence?" or "Is the Lord speaking to you?"

It may be very obvious what is going on to you – but sometimes people are simply not aware of what is happening in their own bodies. They can't see the evidence of God at work.

At these times encourage them and try and build their faith, "Look I can see the presence of God on you in the way that you are shaking and crying. That's OK, it is just a sign of his presence. He is at work in you to heal. Let's pray some more."

At this point of the prayer you may also discover, as you ask God and talk to the person, that something else is going on and that what looked like a physical healing issue actually requires the expulsion of a demon or is the result of some hurt in the past.

So you may go back a couple of steps and go to a different prayer.

There are four main areas in which we seek healing. Usually at least two are involved and sometimes all four:

- 1 The spirit
- 2 Healing of past hurts
- 3 Healing the body
- 4 Demonisation

Measure

Establish whether there has been any change. If you are praying for healing ask the person to rate their current condition, "If, when we started praying, the pain was at 10 and if zero is completely pain free, what are you at now?" Ensure that they are being truthful and not just trying to make you feel better.

If they were unable to move in some way before, can they now? Bless what is happening and any sign of progress. Keep praying until they are healed or until you get stuck.

Step Five: Post-prayer counsel

Question: What should they do to keep their healing? What should they do if they have not been healed?

Whatever else people must be led to experience and believe that primarily God loves them, He is reaching out for them, he is pursuing them for a loving relationship. Make sure you keep

telling them this and ensure that the way you have treated them has been entirely loving and affirming so that, when healing is not apparent, they still experience the love of God.

Where people have not been healed one should encourage them that it is OK to get more prayer. Most usefully in the context of a small group – a housegroup.

Where they have been healed it is often appropriate to provide a small amount of counsel related to their condition. If sin has been a cause of illness then they should change their ways and sin no more.

Most often your counsel to them will be to pursue the disciplines of the faith:

- Read the bible and study
- Pray and set aside time for devotions
- Worship – both on their own and in the corporate gathering
- Give their money to the church
- Find somewhere to serve
- Become part of a small group

Most obviously though, complete and long-term healing comes through the accountable pastoral relationships within the community of faith. In a place where people are part of a small group and know others and are known. Where they can be prayed for regularly. Where there is pastoral oversight to guide them on their journey.

StoppingWhere you have engaged in conversation with the person it is straightforward to move from prayer to questions to counsel and then to end.

"God seems to have healed you/blessed you, now let's go and pray for someone else/let's get a coffee."

You may talk with them after praying and then go back and pray again several times. But when you feel that you have finished or that nothing is happening, stop.