

SCRIPTURES OF THE APOSTLES IN ACTION

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus His close followers are no longer called disciples. They have become the apostles, the "sent ones" who are now fully commissioned to carry on in the Lord's absence the work He trained them to do: preach the good news and heal the sick. To their number others have been added, most notably Paul of Tarsus. The Church is launched with signs and wonders; so is its healing ministry.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. Acts 2:42-43 ESV

The Healing Ministry of Peter

This healing of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple illustrates a primary characteristic of how healing is to be done under the New Covenant. Peter builds faith with his words, sees faith rising in the man, senses the leading of God in the moment and then boldly [commands healing](#) to take place in Jesus Name. He later explained to the Jewish authorities that the healing had happened through the power of Jesus Name. Unlike much of traditional church praying, however, Peter used the Name -- not in petition to the Lord -- but in command to the man and/or his body.



Peter spoke with boldness based upon his faith-confidence in his power and authority as a follower of Jesus. Upon returning from imprisonment Peter acknowledges in prayer that the power that his words had released which healed the lame man was not his own but belonged to God. It was God's "hand" working through Peter and the boldness that was in him and in his words. Naturally enough, Peter is praying now for more boldness so that more of God's power will be released. The "scary" thing about praying for healing this way (the New Testament way) is that it puts us out there in a place of risk, where genuine boldness is needed.

Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking



and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Acts 3:1-10 ESV

In the next chapter, another characteristic of the healing ministry is revealed: It brings conflict and controversy, even among the faith community. Some of the Jewish people saw the miracle and believed that God was doing a new thing through these followers of Jesus. Others saw the same miracle and wanted to silence the apostles and bring their healing ministry to an end. We should expect this and be ready to do what Peter did. He used the attention that controversy always brings as a spotlight to showcase the gospel message he carried. This isn't possible if we find ourselves shocked and confused by controversy, wounded by accusations, or made fearful by opposition. So, let us keep praying for boldness (and compassion) to find the right way to say the right words!

On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead-by him this man is standing before you well. This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:5-12 ESV

This concluding section shows us how wonderful it is when we stand our ground in prayer and faith. Not only will we see the Lord coming to our rescue, we will find ourselves drawn deeper into the mystery of His love and power. The Lord "shows up" with such evidence of His presence that they are "filled with the Holy Spirit" and went out testifying with boldness. Pause for just a moment. Let us remember why they were filled with fresh boldness. They had been praying for it! Why? Because in the face of the conflict and controversy, they probably didn't feel bold. We ask for what we don't have, right? So, it is with us. We may not feel bold when opposition or discouraging times come, but that's the best time to pray for what we don't have and desperately need: fresh boldness!

And now, Lord, look upon their threats and grant to your servants to continue to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. Acts 4:29-31 ESV



Peter Is Joined by Others

As the revival intensified in Jerusalem not just Peter alone, but others of the twelve, perhaps even all of "the apostles," began seeing signs and wonders happening as part of their ministry. This is attributed, not to their prayers to God, but to their "hands," indicating that the healing was somehow seen as taking place directly through their faith-activity. Why were the healings taking place in Solomon's Portico? Jesus taught there! It provided a natural place just outside the courts of the Temple where people could meet and be instructed. In addition, such close proximity to the inner courts provided an atmosphere of worship, making both teaching and healing more effective.¹ Just as Jesus both taught and healed, so did the apostles. In fact, the two go dynamically together. The building of our faith comes by the word and healing miracles dramatically confirm the Word being taught.²

Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women, so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. Acts 5:12-16 ESV

Peter's Ministry on the Coast

At Lydda Peter speaks the command of healing directly and boldly to the bedridden man. Then immediately he gives Aeneas a way to act upon both his own faith and Peter's: "rise and make your bed." Perhaps by this time in the revival a faith-expectancy has gathered around Peter as one through whom the Lord has consistently worked. The still small and young Christian community has been seeing signs and wonders taking place like an advancing tide. Surely people had heard the reports about Jesus healing "everyone" who had been brought to Him. Now Jesus' disciples and other followers are doing the same things He did! This was surely building a community of faith that fully expected and joyfully welcomed the miraculous. This is exactly opposite to what Jesus encountered in his home town of Nazareth, where he was once driven out and where he could do few healings "because of" their unbelief.³

Now as Peter went here and there among them all, he came down also to the saints who lived at Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, bedridden for eight years, who was paralyzed. And Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; rise and make your bed." And immediately he rose. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him, and they turned to the Lord. Acts 9:32-35
ESV

When Peter is brought to the bedside of Dorcas who had died, "something" moves on him to put the others outside and seek the Lord for the dead woman to be raised. Peter had seen Jesus do the same thing with Lazarus and with the son of the widow at Nain. What was he thinking? What

was it that moved upon him? How did he sense a leading of the Lord in this situation? Why this woman and not Stephen, the first martyr, who had died earlier? We are only shown that he kneels in prayer to the Lord, then "turning to the body" he speaks forth the words commanding life. We are being shown "how it's done," but we are not getting all of our questions answered! Praying for healing is (in the best sense) a faith experiment with our own faith as the necessary catalyst. It is trial and error with lots of probing of God and His Word; lots of earnest seeking for more boldness and faith-confidence; lots of joyful, surprise-filled moments of success.

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. And he stayed in Joppa for many days with one Simon, a tanner. Acts 9:36-43 ESV

The Healing Ministry of Philip

The healing revival spreads beyond the walls of Jerusalem and the close circle of those who originally followed Jesus. Philip is neither an apostle, nor even a former disciple of Jesus, but one of the new converts who came in after the events of Pentecost. Yet, even with one who stands in the same relationship to Jesus as all of us (ie. knowing Him only by faith), deliverance and healing springs forth. Philip leads with preaching the word and we can well imagine that it is with boldness, based on his approach to the Ethiopian eunuch. Boldness with the Word can stir faith to receiving healing; Philip evidently moved with boldness to take advantage of the Holy Spirit's availability: the people paid close attention to his words and his acts (the signs that "he did").

Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word. Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed to them the Christ. And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits came out of many who were possessed, crying with a loud voice, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. So there was much joy in that city. Acts 8:4-8 ESV

The Healing Ministry of Paul

The first healing that happens in connection with Paul is his own. Blinded in the aftermath of the revelation he received on the road to Damascus, Saul (later Paul) is healed by the Lord through

Ananias. Ananias clearly knows He is being sent by Jesus to lay hands on Saul to heal him and we are shown him doing just that with great boldness. We, too, have been commissioned by Jesus to heal. Ananias had a direct vision of Jesus to inflame his faith; we have the Word of God to confirm ours. Perhaps we need to pray to become as fully convinced as Ananias was that Jesus wants to work through us to heal the persons He sends us to. For his part Saul was probably wide open for receiving anything the Lord might send his way. His world had been turned upside down which opens us to new possibilities, while his faith would have been soaring in the wake of the fresh revelation he had received.

Now there was a disciple at Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." And the Lord said to him, "Rise and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptized; and taking food, he was strengthened. Acts 9:10-19 ESV

Paul's Method of Praying

Paul's way of praying for healing fits the pattern we saw with Peter. Although he prays at times to the Lord to get things started, the healing itself takes place as he lays hands on the person and speaks to them of their condition. In his letter to the Romans, Paul makes it clear that the deeds, signs and wonders (which surely included the healings) took place by joint venture with the Lord. God did them, but He did them through Paul.⁴ That's a different thing than saying, "God did these things at my request." There is also another pattern. In this first passage from Acts 14, not only did Paul have to press forward despite intense opposition, he stayed there a "long time." Such perseverance evidently paid off for many signs and wonders took place. Here then is the pattern: preaching the Word, opposition, faith, perseverance, boldness, prayer (by command and laying on hands), then healing. That's a lot to work through, but it seems to be a typical New Testament pattern.

Now at Iconium they entered together into the Jewish synagogue and spoke in such a way that a great number of both Jews and Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers. So they remained for a long time, speaking boldly for the Lord, who



bore witness to the word of his grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands. Acts 14:1-3 ESV

Some things cannot be sufficiently explained or taught in a classroom. How can you teach exactly what to look for in order to see that a person has “faith to be made well”? All we can say is watch for a look of expectancy, or intensity, or inquisitiveness, or desperation, or hope. We can also say if they look blank, or hardened, or angry, or if they are picking up stones they probably aren’t ready to be healed. Fortunately, we have the same Holy Spirit who was able to help Paul recognize the moment as had earlier helped Peter with the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. The tricky part is not getting the prompting, for it is the Holy Spirit’s delight to give it in a way that we can receive it. He is the Best Teacher on earth. No, the tricky part, is not being so caught up in our own agenda for how the meeting or the moment is going to go. If we aren’t careful we’ll go rushing right by the little nudge intended to get our attention. Paul got the nudge and leapt into re-directed action.

Now at Lystra there was a man sitting who could not use his feet. He was crippled from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul speaking. And Paul, looking intently at him and seeing that he had faith to be made well, said in a loud voice, "Stand upright on your feet." And he sprang up and began walking. Acts 14:8-10
ESV

Most of us ministers should all thank God that we haven’t killed someone with boredom, yet. Paul did (just joking, of course). But it didn’t phase him. We are told that the young man was “taken up dead” which doesn’t mean he was carried upstairs while dead, but that death had taken him away. So, Paul went downstairs to the rescue and announced the young man’s recovery. Did he pray for that recovery? Probably he did. Perhaps, as he “went down” or as he took him “in his arms.” Either way it was a miracle which shows us two things. Paul did not sink into confusion, condemnation or self-doubt as some of us might over such a situation: preaching so long someone fell asleep and fell to their death. That might sink our confidence in God, but we see no sign of it in Paul. He knew and believed in the grace of God for his life and for our lives like nobody else (other than Jesus). Hence, a miracle could happen through his wide-open faith. The other thing we see is that he went right back to preaching and “conversing” with them until daybreak! Evidently, many in the Early Church had a deep and abiding desire to be taught the things of God. This, too, is a necessary pre-condition for an atmosphere of faith for healing.

And a young man named Eutychus, sitting at the window, sank into a deep sleep as Paul talked still longer. And being overcome by sleep, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down and bent over him, and taking him in his arms, said, "Do not be alarmed, for his life is in him." And when Paul had gone up and had broken bread and eaten, he conversed with them a long while, until daybreak, and so departed. Acts 20:9-11 ESV

Because scripture does not say all we would like it to tell us, we can easily be tempted to fill in the blanks with our own reasons and explanations. The early Quakers called Satan “the Reasoner” because his reasons led Eve away from the faith position God had earlier revealed. Here the temptation is to figure out how Paul was healed without a prayer being said. What was

going on? Was it the Angel who shielded him? Was it Paul's deep faith that forged the shield? Or his commitment? Certainly, the Lord is a shield to those who fear Him.⁵ Still, we suspect that many who love the Lord might not have been so well shielded. Was it Paul's abiding sense of destiny and his faith that nothing could stop his assignment from being completed?⁶ Perhaps. We just don't know. This, too, is something we have to learn to get used to: Not having all the answers! Just keep walking forward in faith anyway.

After we were brought safely through, we then learned that the island was called Malta. The native people showed us unusual kindness, for they kindled a fire and welcomed us all, because it had begun to rain and was cold. When Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and put them on the fire, a viper came out because of the heat and fastened on his hand. When the native people saw the creature hanging from his hand, they said to one another, "No doubt this man is a murderer. Though he has escaped from the sea, Justice has not allowed him to live." He, however, shook off the creature into the fire and suffered no harm. They were waiting for him to swell up or suddenly fall down dead. But when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him, they changed their minds and said that he was a god. Acts 28:1-6 ESV

Paul seems never to have passed up an opportunity to lay hands for healing on someone. He hears that his host's father is ill and immediately goes to pray for him. We might imagine that he was so eager because he knew his prayers were always going to be answered. He never had to worry about being made to look a fool. But that can't be it. No one except Jesus could have had such an absolute assurance that every prayer would be answered and yet in Nazareth, even Jesus wasn't able to heal many people.⁷ Perhaps, it was as simple as this: Paul wasn't worried about failing because he wasn't worried what people might think. Perhaps, he only cared about what God would think, if he didn't give it his best shot. The "no guts, no glory" rule applies here in spades: if we've got no guts, God gets no glory. Martin Luther said that faith is a "bold, daring confidence in the grace of God." This is surely the message of the apostles. Let's set sail with them!

Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the chief man of the island, named Publius, who received us and entertained us hospitably for three days. It happened that the father of Publius lay sick with fever and dysentery. And Paul visited him and prayed, and putting his hands on him healed him. And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured. They also honored us greatly, and when we were about to sail, they put on board whatever we needed. Acts 28:7-10 ESV

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Scriptures and Foot Notes

¹ The Lord says that He "inhabits" the praises of His people. Such infusions of the presence of God cannot help but enhance everything we may be doing: Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Psalm 22:3 ESV

² So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. Romans 10:17

³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. Matthew 13:53-58 ESV

⁴ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience-by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God-so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ. Romans 15:17-19 ESV

⁵ You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield. Psalm 115:11 ESV

⁶ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, and he said, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.' So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. Act 27:23-25 ESV

⁷ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. Mark 6:4-5 ESV