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ACADEMIC JOURNAL ARTICLE *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*

God as Healer: A Closer Look at Biblical Images of Inner Healing with Guiding Questions for Counselors

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Article excerpt

The Christian community almost never speaks with one voice about any one tenet of the faith. Yet there are tenets that the majority of Christ followers assert. One of these fundamental beliefs is that God heals and restores broken people. Doctors may perform extraordinary procedures which save lives or bring relief, but few Christians will hesitate to thank God for the physical or emotional healing. Similarly, Christian therapists acknowledge that God provides the ultimate power to heal clients. However, many divergent models of healing exist and the Christian psychologist may not feel adequately trained to discern which models best reflect historic Christian doctrine and biblical interpretation. This article seeks to avoid atomistic use of bible passages or superficial use of the text by building on an alternative foundation - a thorough Biblically based, theological review of the Bible's overarching message of healing - for clinicians as they develop their own understanding how God heals broken people.

(ProQuest: ... denotes formulae omitted.)

Few Christians deny the healing power of God. Most agree that God's healing agency stands behind every successful human effort to bring relief to broken people. The biblical text seems to support such belief with innumerable narrative and poetic examples of God's activity in redeeming, transforming, and relieving human suffering. Despite modern psychology's early rejection of religious explanations for change (e.g., King, 1909) the clinical landscape now includes many medical and psychological researchers willing to talk openly about the role of spirituality in healing and health (e.g., Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Pargament, 1997; Shafranske, 1996; Siegel, 1986; Thomas, 1997). As a result, there is a growing body of literature suggesting that spiritual well being positively influences health and coping with illness (e.g., Plante & Sherman, 2001; Paloutzian & Park, 2005).

While the psychological community investigates religiosity and spirituality as mediator and moderator variables of health, pastoral writers within the Christian tradition explore the topic of inner healing and produce a separate body of literature. But this literature - mostly popular in style - rarely affords the thoughtful Christian psychologist the opportunity to think critically about the theological foundations for healing since many of these works are based on a few support verses, Jesus' healing ministry, or vivid personal experiences.

This article seeks to build a better foundation for the Christian psychologist providing a review of the language and imagery of healing in the bible using biblical theological techniques. The biblical theological approach allows the reader to look at individual texts from the light of the entire canon. Such a review will give counselors an opportunity to shape their own clinical practice regarding the nature and role of God's healing activity and avoid simplistic biblical application.

Definitions

The reader may first wish to define both inner healing and biblical theology. What is inner healing? From what grid should empirically informed, Christ-following clinicians view healing language in the Bible? Should we treat it as a theological term or something to operationalize and study? Unfortunately, we often use the language of healing, health, and wholeness casually, without a satisfactory understanding of their meanings. Despite hundreds of volumes on healing, it remains a deep mystery for many - a mystery often entangled in doctrinal controversies over the gifts of the Holy Spirit. For the purpose of this essay we define healing or inner healing as a divine work bringing growth or positive spiritual change to painful or distorted perceptions, experiences, habits, or emotions of a person. Such a definition does not attempt to ascertain the cause of the inner turmoil, its location in the person (e.g., body, soul, psyche, etc. ...