

# Jesus Came Healing and Curing

By

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## Abstract

Jesus came primarily to forgive sins but on occasion, he cured the sick. Healing provides the greater good since it restores the relationship between Christ and us. Curing reverses the organism's cellular degeneration, but is not necessary for salvation. While Jesus performs many miracles, he does not impose his will upon us. The death and resurrection of Christ makes the forgiveness of sin and healing possible.

Key Words: healing, curing, person, freedom, death, addiction.

## Jesus Came Healing and Curing

The aim of this paper is to examine the connection between healing and curing in the biblical story of the paralytic and to explain why healing has priority over curing. Jesus frequently uses parables to explain his divine mission. He uses familiar examples drawn from everyday life but the people do not understand: “This people will listen and listen, but not understand; they will look and look, but not see, because their minds are dull and they have stopped up their ears and have closed their eyes.”<sup>1</sup> The hope is that an inductive study of these parables will generate conclusions that are in harmony with the Christian message of salvation. Christ died for our sins that we might have eternal life. He teaches us to love God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. I bring the following perspective to the text of the paralytic—an interest in the deeper message of the gospel and a useful distinction between healing and curing. I conclude that the healing we receive from Christ is proof that he loves us. The argument opens with a description of key terms (healing, curing, and person).

### HEALING

The word healing refers to the integration of mind and body. The corruption of the body is the result of sin. Sin divides mind and body, as Saint Paul says:

My point is that you should live in accord with the spirit and you will not yield to the cravings of the flesh. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed. This is why you do not do what your will intends.<sup>2</sup>

Saint Augustine cites this text with approval; “Thus I understood, by my own experience, what I had read, how the flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh.”<sup>3</sup> Healing is a process of reconnecting mind and body through the forgiveness of sin. Unity of ‘spirit and flesh’ is a sign of perfection (holiness). The sacrament of reconciliation restores our relationship with God. The contrite become less likely to pursue self-will and more likely to pursue God’s will. God offers himself freely to all. We do not always accept divine healing. The state of sin and the corresponding division of mind and body dim our awareness of God’s love for us. The world of being does not present itself to consciousness in full light when we break relationship with God. Sin engenders despair and death. The forgiveness of sins is cause for rejoicing since it returns us to harmony with the

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 13:14-15.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Paul. Galatians 5: 16-18.

<sup>3</sup> Saint Augustine. The Confessions. Book 8, 5:11.

divine plan and transforms our negative emotions of despair into positive states of hope and well-being.

## CURING

All living things resist destruction, but death is inevitable. Disease causes the disunity of a living organism. When medicine cures disease, it delays the effects of cellular death. Complex cells in the cortex are the first part of the brain to die followed by the death of the mid-brain and brain stem, which controls heartbeat and respiration. The medical community worldwide is moving towards the whole brain definition of death. When Jesus cures the leper, he reverses the progressive biological disintegration of a dying organism. The resurrection of Lazarus epitomizes Christ's willingness and power to cure us. Lazarus had been dead four days. The embalming of Lazarus is in accordance with the practice of the day to wrap the body in cloths. He was in the state of irreversible biological death. Martha and her sister Mary—the one who poured perfume on the Lord's feet—called on Jesus to help her brother Lazarus: "Lord, your dear friend is sick." Jesus approached the tomb and called loudly; "Lazarus, come out! The dead man came out, bound hand and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. Untie him, Jesus told them, and let him go free"<sup>4</sup>

The power of Jesus to raise the dead is miraculous. The power of Jesus to forgive sin is even greater, as Mark tells us in the story of the paralytic. While Jesus comes healing and curing, the greater of these is healing or the forgiveness of sins. It seems possible to suggest from the foregoing that Jesus cures for the sake of healing.

## Being a Person

Since Jesus heals and cures persons, we need to examine what it means to be a person. We take our clue from the Genesis. God said; "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."<sup>5</sup> God exists as a Blessed Trinity of three distinct persons in one God. We do not understand the mystery of the Blessed Trinity but we can explain it in a way that makes sense to us. God does not have three intellects and three wills. We can imagine God as three distinct personalities, however. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit exist in loving relationships. This suggests that humans must be the output of loving relationships. In other words, we are the output of associations that mirror the relationships taking place between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I have explained elsewhere that God the Father manifests as Creator of the world and all things contained in it. God the Son

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<sup>4</sup> John 11:43-44.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 1:26.

teaches us to love one another, and God the Holy Spirit is wisdom.<sup>6</sup> Following this scheme (since we are made in the image and likeness of God), our personal relationships take place at three fundamental levels, namely, (1) material environment, (2) social realm, and (3) intellect and will. We act as dynamic units though we do so as contingent, finite, beings. It follows that while we are equally human we are not equally personal. God gives us the gift of intellect, will and the property of freedom. Some defining associations such as our genetic structure and family associations (1 and 2) are in part determined for us (no one picks their parents or DNA structure) others are freely chosen by us. As we mature, we select our geography of place, friends, and freely develop moral habits. Healing and curing affect the whole person. Participation in our sacred environment enables us to reconnect mind and body through the phantasm of sensory experience. Jesus commands us to love one another. His request leads to the development of a social self. Internal associations take place in the realm of mind. They include conscious and unconscious processes alike, and the human will. We function as dynamic units. The parts or distinct streams of associations act primarily for the good of the whole and only secondarily for themselves. The whole of us gains when Jesus heals the mind body divide and cures the part. The gospel invites us to be Christ like. We know ourselves by knowing Jesus and strive to become more like him in our person-making associations. This sets the stage for the paper's main argument.

### The Paralytic is Healed and Cured

Throughout Sacred Scriptures, we read about the many miracles Jesus performed, including numerous instances of healing and curing of individuals. On occasion Jesus heals the unclean by casting out demons, while at other times scriptural texts focus on how Jesus cures the sick and infirmed. Jesus says to individuals seeking wholeness of body and mind 'your faith has saved you.' Jesus does not heal individuals without faith. Since Jesus came to forgive sins, it seems possible to suggest that the forgiveness of sin is more important to him than curing the body, that is, curing is for the sake of healing. Some individuals are deceived by wealth or power—the surface appearance of things. They do not ask to be forgiven or cured. They mistakenly believe that wealth and power signify divine approval and exempt them from the need for atonement. Consequently, Jesus' social relationships focus on the poor, the lepers, the marginalized or those individuals that know their sinfulness and need for healing. The culture of the day focuses on material signs of greatness. The text of Mark tells the story of Jesus' return to Capernaum, and what he thinks about that focus:

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<sup>6</sup> Bryson, Ken. An Interpretation of Genesis 1:26. *Journal of Philosophy and Theology*. Vol. 17, issue 1 (2005).

While he was delivering God's word to them, some people arrived bringing a paralyzed man to him. The four who carried him were unable to bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they began to open up the roof over the spot where Jesus was. When they had made a hole, they let down the mat on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "My son, your sins are forgiven." Now some of the scribes were sitting there asking themselves: "Why does the man talk in this way? He commits blasphemy! Who can forgive sins except God alone?" Jesus was immediately aware of their reasoning, though they kept it to themselves, and he said to them: "Why do you harbor these thoughts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk again'? That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (he said to the paralyzed man), "I command you: Stand up! Pick up your mat and go home." The man stood and picked up his mat and went outside in the sight of everyone. They were awestruck; all gave praise to God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"<sup>7</sup>

The text illustrates that Jesus does not look at outward appearances; He comes to forgive sins; "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart."<sup>8</sup> Jesus saw the faith of the men that brought the paralytic through the roof of the building and healed him. The act of curing him appears to follow as an afterthought designed to convince observers that He has the power to forgive sins. The proof that Jesus is totally committed to our salvation is that he dies for us. "There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."<sup>9</sup>

The texts of Mark and John also lead us to meditate on the extent of God's love for us. Why does God send His only Son to redeem us when we add nothing to the glory of God? Why does God create the world and all things contained in it, given that we often disrespect the environment? Why does God create persons with intellect and will only to give us the freedom to go to war? Why does God continue to love us when we fail to enter into personal relationship with Him? We stand in the presence of a love that surpasses all comprehension:

I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you are my disciples: your love for one another.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Mark 2:3-12.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Samuel 16:7-8.

<sup>9</sup> John 15:13.

<sup>10</sup> John 13:34-35.

The culture of the day celebrates curing but misses the more important dimension of divine love and healing. The exclamation ‘we have never seen anything like this’ illustrates how unaccustomed we are to the healing power of love. Jesus teaches a new way of living, one that calls us into loving relationship with one another. He teaches us by the love he has for us. Love is a central theme in the gospel of John. The love God has for us is the foundation of the possibility of loving one another; “Love, then, consists in this: not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us and has sent his Son as an offering for our sins.”<sup>11</sup> The people did not understand this radical act.

Jesus is the shining example of unconditional faith and love. He asks us to make a similar commitment to love God and one another. The people’s response is not always from the heart, however. Jesus teaches that love and faith trump reason and materialism. He came for sinners, the weak, the marginalized, and the paralytics, that we might have eternal life. Jesus invites us to enter into loving relationship with him.

Faith is the cornerstone of entering into a loving relationship with God; “Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, and all your household.”<sup>12</sup> The dialectics of faith, reason, love, and commitment to Christ is central to the Christian life. The New Testament contains more than 50 references to the centrality of faith in the combined texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The faith is dynamic because it involves the heart as well as reason. While we read scriptures to know Christ, we become Christians by putting that message into action; “Faith in the heart leads to justification, confession on the lips to salvation.”<sup>13</sup>

Søren Kierkegaard calls his commitment to faith and religion ‘becoming subjective.’ He distinguishes between subjective and objective truths. He claims that the objective rational truths of science stand in sharp contrast to the subjective truths of religious faith. The relationship between reason and faith is a debate among believers; the belief that rational argument supports religious faith offsets the claim that argument impoverishes faith. We avoid the debate because Kierkegaard’s argument is psychological rather than epistemological. His interest is in the fact that the religious life calls for a commitment that moves us beyond reason. His early work sets the stage for it; *Fear and Trembling* questions why Abraham agrees to obey God’s commandment to sacrifice his son Isaac? God appears to be breaking His own ethical law against killing. The prolific Kierkegaard struggles with this problem until the publication of his second last work *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. This work earns him the title ‘father of

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:10-12.

<sup>12</sup> Acts 16:31-32.

<sup>13</sup> Romans 10:10.

existentialism' because it combines subjectivity, commitment, and action. Kierkegaard recognizes that the religious life moves beyond reason and the truths of ethics by focusing on a faith commitment. What counts is not simply knowing God's truth, or believing God's truth, but doing something about it. Following Christ calls for a leap into relationship with God. In his words:

When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.<sup>14</sup>

Abraham risks everything by entering into relationship with God. In the process, he gains everything because God spares his son. In the end, Kierkegaard understands the true meaning of Christianity. Daniel Johnson wonders if Kierkegaard introduces an extra biblical criterion for becoming a Christian in his philosophy of subjective truth. On the contrary, Johnson argues that scriptures present the death of Christ as an act of true subjectivity.<sup>15</sup> Christ is fully committed to us. His invitation to enter into relationship with God is equally authentic. Christ asks us to model the process of becoming religious on his own religious commitment. The religious life exists beyond the ethical life. This is a place beyond reason where the individual in existential faith risks everything for love of Christ. The grace of God produces a similar response in the forgiven. We participate in God's healing grace by focusing on the relationship itself rather than on ethics. Faith moves us beyond logic to a place in Christianity where love trumps reason. Christ died for the forgiveness of sin. Reason cannot make sense of the divine sacrifice. We cannot imagine why Christ would die for us. The refusal to move beyond reason blocks the possibility of accepting healing. The acceptance of healing leads us to imitate Christ in loving the Father and loving one another.

The healing of the ten lepers illustrates this perspective. In our day, we pray God to cure disease but forget to use suffering as an invitation to thank God by helping others.

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<sup>14</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Swenson, David F. & Lowrie, Walter (trans.) Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press (1974) p. 178.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Johnson. On Truth as Subjectivity in Kierkegaard's *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. *Quodlibet Journal*. Volume 5 Number 2-3. (July 2003).

The Gospel of Luke reports that as Jesus was entering a village he encountered ten lepers:

Keeping their distance, they raised their voices and said, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he responded, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” On their way there they were cured. One of them, realizing that he had been cured, came back praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself on his face at the feet of Jesus and spoke his praises. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus took the occasion to say, “Were not all ten made whole? Where are the other nine? Was there no one to return and give thanks to God except this foreigner?” He said to the man, “Stand up and go your way; your faith has been your salvation.” (Luke 17:12-19)

Jesus cured ten lepers and offered healing to all but only one returned to give thanks. Giving thanks is a sign of healing. The other nine presumably were cured but not healed because only one moved from the heart (faith) to the lips (action).

In my opinion, peace follows healing. The mind is in harmony with the body because the intellect judges that all is well in our relationship with God, and religious faith moves us to share personal stories of healing with other wounded individuals. To affirm that all is well is not to brag or overstate our role in the relationship with Christ. The possibility of being in relationship with God does not come from us. We stand in the presence of God’s gift of love. The presence of God humbles us. The knowledge that God makes us in his image and likeness (Genesis 1.26), overwhelms us. We sinners, individuals unworthy ‘to untie the strap of His sandal’, enter into a fresh round of relationship with God. We determine the presence of healing by the effects of divine healing on us. The awareness of healing moves us beyond reason into the spiritual realm of peace, happiness, serenity, the love of God and the love of neighbor. Character building or person making is the outcome of healing and positive emotions replace negative emotions. God does not impose His will upon us. We ask for His healing grace of forgiveness. God punishes sin but he also forgives.<sup>16</sup> We implore God to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Many do not ask for forgiveness; they look for a cure to disease but forsake the opportunity to ask Jesus for healing.

Jesus left to hang and dry on a cross for the forgiveness of sin provides the shining example of Christian love and faith. The suffering of Christ provides a way for us to use our personal suffering as an invitation for Christ to enter into our life. We ask for healing. The fact that healing often takes place in the absence of curing is a gift not a curse. It provides a mechanism whereby we can identify our suffering with the suffering of Christ so that we too might rise to new life. The

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<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel 20:33-44.



phenomenon of resonance and identification with the suffering Christ is central to the Christian message. It illustrates why Jesus has two natures; Jesus is God and Jesus is human. The love Jesus has for us provides the metaphysical ground of the possibility of entering in to relationship with God by loving one another; “I call you friends, since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus came healing and curing that we might know the love of God and the invitation to enter into loving relationship with one another in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## Reflection

The effects of divine healing touch the whole person. In healing, the flowers are brighter than ever, and the smell of trees sweeter. We become more loving and tolerant of differences among people. We become aware of an intangible presence of love in the room. We are at peace and happy. Divine healing makes us whole.

We find examples of healing without cure in several areas of life. Let me draw on two examples. The first is the stoic acceptance of personal death in the face of terminal illness. The distinction between life sustaining and life prolonging measures is useful. The primary goal of medicine is to save life. The death causing action cannot be initiated by the physician (euthanasia) or the patient (assisted suicide), but if the condition is irreversible (life prolonging), the patient is allowed to die and the focus shifts to palliative care. Medical ethics recognizes the futility of pursuing heroic measures. The attempt to provide an environment free from pain is not always successful.

Hospice care relies on professionals and on volunteers to ensure a patient’s quality of life. No heroic measures or life saving technology is used. The patient dies in the company of a loving human being, a companion on the journey to God. The feeding is by hand. We share in the pain of the human condition with the other. We hold hands. One suffering human being is available to the other.

The volunteer begins by sharing a personal story of pain. We use the experience of personal pain as a bridge to the other, as the pain of the crucified Christ is a bridge to our own suffering. Healing takes place as the pain of the one resonates with the pain of the other, even in the absence of a shared experience of dying. Christ taught us love so we could love one another and facilitate healing.

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<sup>17</sup> John 15:15-16.

The person-making process is a term I coined to measure holistic healing. Healing is a process of mending broken associations in the person-making relationships. The term I reserve for this activity is spiritual welding.<sup>18</sup> The spiritual welder is aware that persons are the output of three distinct streams of associations. Welders are catalysts in service to the pain of the other. We motivate the wounded other to be empowered by the healing love of Christ. We draw attention to broken associations in the story of the other. These are places in need of spiritual welding. Christian healing works through other persons. We become the gospel in action for the other. Together we live the Christian gospel of brokenness and resurrection.

This attitude transforms personal suffering into an opportunity for spiritual growth. Unfortunately, most of us have to wait until the ‘trivial injury’ develops into a terminal illness before an attitude of spiritual urgency towards others arises.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to inspire my students to develop this attitude early in life, I routinely sentence them to death. I do this in my death and dying classes, of course, to maintain an appearance of normalcy. The attempt to imagine our very own death in the morning is often sobering. I invite them to personal reflection on the following points: (1) a personal obituary and (2) last day activities, and (3) describe the manner of death.

I suppose that only the greatest optimist would hope for a deathbed conversion in those circumstances, and by this, I do not claim that my students need to make amends, but the fact is that most of us tend to procrastinate because we think we are going to live forever. How profitable is the exercise? The obituary in the main is written in the third person and the focus is primarily ‘they die someday’ rather than self. The last few hours of life are frequently spent jet setting to exotic places, partying, having children and leaving just enough time to graduate—all this in a 12-hour time span. The reported manner of death is usually unrealistic citing a terminal illness, or in some cases an unfortunate pink panther death making love to some lucky partner! Some students get it, however. The mock condemnation sometimes presents as an opportunity for healing. This is wonderful because we need not always wait until the moment of death to appreciate the beauty of life.

I draw my second example from the fellowship of alcoholics anonymous (AA). A sound distinction between healing and curing exists in AA. In this

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<sup>18</sup> Anyone interested in reading more on this can consult my articles Spirituality, Meaning and Transcendence. In Palliative and Supportive Care. Cambridge University Press. Vol. 2, number 3, (2004). Pp 321-328. In addition, see my Spiritual Welding 101, and Spiritual Welding 200 articles in the online Yale Journal for Humanities and Medicine. (2004 and 2009).

<sup>19</sup> The possibility of personal death functions as a source of inspiration. See Leo Tolstoy’s short story The Death of Ivan Ilyich.

tradition, individuals heal without a cure. They cannot return to normal drinking. The practice calls on God 'or a higher power' for help. Spiritual principles are at the heart of this business. The connection with Christ, Kierkegaard, and subjective truth or faith in action is the subjective admission of substance dependence and a willingness to help other alcoholics. The commandment love one another works through other (alcohol dependent) persons. The movement is fundamentally spiritual but not necessarily religion specific. The Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Observation 4<sup>th</sup> edition, (DSM4) does not attempt to measure spirituality (fortunately) or profess a methodology sharp enough to harness subjective truth in the distinction between substance abuse and dependence. The distinction between them is critical and serves to illustrate the nature of religious faith as a spiritual commitment to enter into relationship with God. Let me explain in more detail. Individuals can abuse the use of a substance such as alcohol without claiming to be alcoholics. The difference between abuse and dependence is in subjective truth, that is, in the individual's acceptance of a fundamental inability to ingest alcohol safely. Human denial and the stigma of alcoholism is such that most heavy drinkers prefer to think of themselves as guilty of abusing alcohol rather than of being dependent on it. The evidence suggests that alcoholism is a progressive disease. At some point, the individual connects with other suffering addicts to ask God for help. It seems possible to suggest that the process mirrors the path taken by Kierkegaard's religious thinker. The bankruptcy of the aesthetic stage and the absence of commitment in the ethical stage give way to religious faith. I think that we can draw a parallel to our relationship with Christ. Christ respects our free will and does not force us to accept the gift of faith and forgiveness. The recognition of our dependence on God leads to the leap of religious faith. The heart and lips give thanks to God for the gift of healing.

The 12-Step program is also successful in the treatment of behavioral dependencies. The literature does not offer a cure for these behavioral/substance diseases, but promises healing to anyone willing to let go of reason and to use a personal experience of suffering to help others. We find proof that healing takes place in the online text of Alcoholics Anonymous:

We (millions worldwide) are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for

ourselves. Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being filled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.<sup>20</sup>

Why do individuals in terminal illness, substance dependency, divorce, bankruptcy (...) obtain healing while many do not? The simple answer is control or the unwillingness to ask Christ for help. The invitation to move beyond reason and personal control of spiritual outcomes has far-reaching implications. Christ heals the biblical lepers, deaf, blind, possessed, paralytic, (...) because they ask for help. Others prefer to control their own religious outcomes. The gospel of John has this warning for unbelievers:

You belong to what is below; I belong to what is above. You belong to this world—a world which cannot hold me. That is why I said you would die in your sins. You will surely die in your sins unless you come to believe that I AM. (...) When you lift up the Son of Man you will come to realize that I AM and that I do nothing by myself. I say only what the Father has taught me. The One who sent me is with me. He has not deserted me since I always do what pleases him.<sup>21</sup>

John adds that because Jesus spoke this way, many came to believe in him. Healing transforms their pain into a source of joy and hope. Hope is the fundamental stuff of life.

## CONCLUSION

We take two related approaches to scriptures. In a first movement of reason, we use sacred texts as an inductive basis to arrive at an insight into the essence of Christianity. This is but a beginning because healing depends on a second movement of the heart, as religious faith moves us into existential healing. At this point, we invite the Holy Spirit to heal us through these holy texts and to give us the wisdom to know how to love God and serve others. We recognize that Christ invites us to walk his walk and talk his talk.

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<sup>20</sup> The Big Book Online Fourth Edition. Ch. 6 Into Action. (2010) pp. 83-84.

<sup>21</sup> John 8:23-29.

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