

healed at last



**SEPARATING
BIBLICAL TRUTH
FROM MYTH**

SCOTT BLACKWELL

Meningitis at the age of three left Scott Blackwell with a legacy of serious life-long health problems, including the severe limp he still walks with. But his physical ailments were only the half of it. By his own admission, he found himself at the age of eighteen “tired, starving, sick, experimenting widely with any drug I could find, mildly suicidal, and alone”.

This book tells how God brought profound healing into Scott Blackwell’s life. But it is also the story of Scott’s search for what the Bible teaches about physical healing, in this life and the next. Many Christian pastors make strong claims today about God’s promise to heal all our physical illnesses. What are we to make of these claims? What does the Bible actually teach about healing?

Scott’s examination of these important issues is personal, warm, practical and often funny. But it is also clear, thorough and compelling in its presentation of the Bible’s teaching about healing.

Healed at Last offers truth, hope and encouragement for everyone who longs to be healed.



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ISBN 978 1 922206 56 5

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Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

This book is first and foremost dedicated to my wife, Deborah, who knew perfectly well what the consequences of her decision might be, but went ahead and married me anyway. She is my lifelong companion, best friend, inspiration, consultant and anchor. I am at my best when I am in her company.

Second, it is dedicated to the students of Robert Menzies College and the members of Trinity Chapel Macquarie. I was privileged to be their pastor and chaplain for a brief while—and I am convinced that they taught me more than I ever taught them.

Third, to the ‘Itchy Feet’ group of 2009-2011 (you know who you are), with whom I debated, exegeted, pontificated, and came to understand again what excitement is to be found in reading the Bible as it should be read: with fresh, open eyes and a sharp, inquiring mind.

Fourth, to my friend Professor Chris Bellenger, without whose support, encouragement and counsel I would not have recovered the strength to stand.

Finally, I write for the people I love who are not able to read this book. I write in memory of my brothers Ken and Denis, for whom healing always seemed just out of reach. I also write for Shirlee Bedwell and Margaret Thompson, who, in the midst of failing health, are no longer able to read—but they do remember the steadfastness of their Saviour.

All monies and proceeds raised from the publication and purchase of this book are donated to Trinity Chapel Macquarie (which is a ministry of Robert Menzies College), for the support of evangelical student ministry at Macquarie University.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the Master and Board of Robert Menzies College for their insistence that ‘study leave’ be included in my contract—and then for insisting that I take it to pursue this endeavour. Their generous and good-hearted encouragement was the impetus that began this work.

I am also deeply grateful to Dr Peter Bolt and Dr Ken Simpson for their surprising enthusiasm, endless encouragement, advice and expertise. Likewise, I’m grateful to Tara Smith, Tony Payne, and the good folk at Matthias Media who have all given generous amounts of time to pawing over this manuscript in order to turn my meandering thoughts into a readable and coherent whole.

Consequently, I declare without hesitation that any errors contained within this work (whether theological or grammatical) are entirely my own, and a product of my own stubbornness and refusal to listen to very, very good advice. These errors are in no way attributable to the good and godly men and women named above.

Scott Blackwell
February 2014

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Foreword

This book began at exactly 3.35am on a Thursday morning. I was lying in bed, where I had been since 10.00pm, wondering why I couldn't sleep. My wife's soft breathing beside me was deep and peaceful.

It had been three days since my return from hospital after a total right hip prosthesis (hip replacement), and I couldn't get comfortable. My doctor and numerous physiotherapists had instructed me to sleep on my back. Not once in my entire life had I ever slept on my back. In dire emergency, they had acquiesced, I could sleep on my left side with a pillow wedged between my knees to prevent the right leg from falling forward during sleep (which would open the newly-stitched muscles and dislocate the joint). I'd never slept on my left side either. Alas, I've always been a stomach sleeper (the *mortal enemy* of hip surgery recovery). I tried the back. I tried the left side. But, in the end, I stared at the night-black ceiling and tried to pray. The only thing I wanted to pray was that God might render me instantly unconscious and allow me the blessing of sleep. But he didn't.

So it was that I found myself (at 3.35am) pondering how exactly, at the age of 48, I found myself in this position—and why only a reasonably long period of discomfort, hard work and perseverance was going to bring me out of it. My thoughts wandered to questions that, even though they were not new to me, seemed to take on a renewed urgency.

Why had God allowed this to happen? Why had he never fixed my physical problems—even though I, along with many others, had often asked (and even begged) him to? Why would he not assist me now and make it all better—by a touch, by a word, by an answer to my prayer? Why was he so quiet when I so badly needed some evidence that he was there and interested in me?

I am acutely aware that such questions are not just my own. I have sat at the bedsides of dear Christian and non-Christian friends and relatives who have asked exactly these questions upon learning that their cancers had grown. I have held the hands of those receiving the news that their child would be profoundly disabled. I have prayed with those whose depression was deepening and with those whose bodies were failing. I have stood at gravesides with my arm around loving husbands and bereft children with these same questions on their lips. My circumstances (at 3.35am) were trivial in comparison to theirs, but the questions were no less pressing and no less troubling.

And so this book was born out of my desire to speak in a straightforward and accessible way about how I understand that God has spoken about healing from his word, the Bible. These thoughts stem from many years of ministry, study and personal struggle. I know that the topic is a deeply emotional one for many people.

Although it is not my intention to offend, I am certain that my thoughts on this divisive subject will cause offence to some. This book does not engage in point-by-point debates with the various healing ministries or ‘healing ministers’ in this country and around the world, although I do confess that at times I have become very angry at the teaching of some Christian leaders and I make no attempt to mask these feelings. Neither does this book contain lengthy discourses on, or analysis of, the continuationist or cessationist theologies that appear to rule this area of Christian debate.¹ My own perspective will, I think,

¹ For a deft summary of these theological positions, see J Woodhouse, ‘Where have all the miracles gone?’, *The Briefing*, vol. 379, April 2010, pp. 11–21, available online (viewed 10 March 2014): www.matthiasmedia.com/briefing/2010/04/where-have-all-the-miracles-gone/

become abundantly clear. I've chosen to use reference works that are commonly available, easily accessible, and readily understood by all—regardless of their level of Christian experience or education. I've cited more technical works only to verify specific pieces of information or to support important conclusions.

So what follows is a straight reading of the Bible and some plain analysis of passages that Christians often misunderstand or misread because they lack a clear frame of reference or system of theological thought. I have no illusions that this little book is the final say on the topic of healing—I only hope it makes a sensible contribution to our thinking on this very personal subject.

Finally, I want to declare one truth very clearly. There is no doubt that the God of the Bible is the God who has the power to heal, both physically and spiritually. This element of God's grace, sovereignty, power and authority is not in dispute. He can heal. He does heal. He will continue to heal. And it is entirely right and proper that God's people continue to pray for such an experience of his grace, sovereignty, power and authority in their lives.

The debate focuses only on our expectations, our integrity, and our honesty with regard to the promises that arise from the careful reading of Scripture. I do not wish to infer at any point that the issues surrounding the topic of personal healing and the miraculous are trivial—they are not. In fact, it is because they are so serious, and because they often involve significant personal struggle, that the promises God makes in Scripture demand careful attention. In the area of healing, as in all application of biblical teaching to the life of faith, it is crucial to separate the truth from myth, speculation, invention and falsehood.

As I have battled with my own questions about physical healing (or the absence of it), I have found that a razor's edge exists between understanding and frustrated bitterness. My hope is that this book will help lead some, who have been cut by difficulty, away from their bitter wounds and into the light of genuine healing.

A brief personal history

“It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door... You step into the Road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to.”—Bilbo Baggins¹



The road to healing

My mother tells the story of coming home from work on a beautiful Queensland summer’s day in 1964 to find me, the youngest of her six children, lying in bed covered in perspiration and delirious. The woman charged with looking after me was in a panic. After complaining of a headache I had collapsed, and I grew more and more disoriented as the afternoon wore on. When my mother touched me, I screamed. When she tried to raise my head, I became hysterical.

There was no phone in the house, so she ran to a neighbour and phoned for an ambulance. Shortly after I arrived at hospital in Brisbane, I was given a lumbar puncture and the doctors

¹ JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, part 1, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Del Rey, New York, 2012.

confirmed a diagnosis of meningitis. This particular strain of meningitis, pneumococcal meningitis, develops as a bacterial growth on the brain. I was three years old. My father was away on bivouac in the army, and by the time my mother made contact with him I was comatose, and the prognosis was poor. I stopped breathing several times, and the doctors inserted a tube through my throat. My mother called the captain of the Michelton Salvation Army church we attended. He came immediately, and together they waited for my father, hoping he would arrive before I died. Meanwhile, the captain's wife contacted members of the church and they gathered to pray. They set up an around-the-clock prayer vigil, petitioning God for my life.

Pneumococcal meningitis had been somewhat rampant in Queensland at the time. Many children had succumbed to its ravages. Several had died and most were left profoundly intellectually or physically disabled, usually both. The doctors were preparing my mother for one of two things—the profound disability of her son, or his death. It seems that they did not factor in the Salvation Army or the efficacy of the prayers of the saints.

The five days of waiting out the coma were long and hard. Forty-five years later, my mother still becomes emotional when she remembers them. She tells the story of a particular nurse who had attended me and grown attached to me. When she ran sobbing into the tearoom where my mother was sitting, my mother's first reaction was to think the worst. But then the nurse blurted out, "He's awake and he wants ice cream!" I was indeed awake and, miraculously, mentally intact as far as the doctors could tell. But I was not untouched by the illness, for the entire right side of my small body was paralyzed. I had no feeling or movement in my right arm or leg.

I remember nothing of my illness or of the physiotherapy I was required to undergo both at home and in hospital for long months afterwards in order to learn to sit, crawl and walk again. My mother, father and siblings remember endless family sessions of walking games with tiny parallel bars, leg-pumping