

‘A truly remarkable achievement, *The Art of Healing Prayer* is a book like no other in its subject matter, taking the meaning of “comprehensive” to new levels. I am astonished at how such a concise book can be so wide-ranging and yet so complete!

‘It is at once creative and reflective, theological and practical, knowledgeable and flexible, and deeply spiritual. The authors offer guidelines and examples as they lead us through a case-study format involving preparation prayers and practical healing prayers, as well as pastoral follow-up prayers, ideally for a participatory team. The suggested examples of healing prayers used throughout the book are quite profound and powerfully appropriate.

‘Based on [the authors’] decades of hands-on experience in training both clergy and laity, *The Art of Healing Prayer* has authenticity, understanding and wisdom oozing from its pages. Here is no triumphalist theorizing but recognition that to seek God’s heart for healing on behalf of others is not a quick fix; rather, it requires an awareness that the inner, outer and relational healing of the whole person – body, mind and spirit – involves an on-going healing journey.

‘The authors are to be commended: I believe this book, although relatively slim, will prove to be a huge gift to the whole faith community.’

*The Revd Trevor Miller, Abbot of the  
Northumbria Community*

‘Living closely with those who’ve been marginalized, I have witnessed how inner wounds plague people for life. And I have seen how their wounds – often more visible because of their vulnerability – expose the wounds of others. How does the Spirit work in this brokenness? Charles and Mary have given us a practical guide and liturgical resource for healing prayer. I know it’s good news because reading it has helped me see better how the Spirit is at work where I live.’

*Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove, author of  
Common Prayer and Strangers at My Door*

‘One of the chief ways we participate in Christ’s healing ministry is through prayer, especially prayer for the healing of the deep wounds of the soul. *The Art of Healing Prayer* takes us into this redemptive work in ways we may not previously have experienced, enabling us better to understand and practice “spiritual heart surgery” with the Great Healer.’

*Darrell Johnson, Teaching Fellow at Regent College,  
and Director of the Centre for Preaching at Carey  
Theological College, Vancouver*

‘Charles Ringma and Mary Dickau masterfully blend scholarship and practical application in presenting their keen understanding of today’s healing landscape. While urging us to recover the biblical vision of healing and to establish healing ministries in our churches and communities, they offer a more than generous assemblage of creative prayers for almost every type of woundedness. Masterful!’

*Dr Richard Johnson, Founder and Director,  
JOHNSON Institute and Senior Adult Ministry*

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THE ART OF HEALING  
PRAYER

*Bringing Christ's wholeness to  
broken people*

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Charles Ringma  
and  
Mary Dickau

**SPCK**

First published in Great Britain in 2015

Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge  
36 Causton Street  
London SW1P 4ST  
www.spck.org.uk

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on p. viii, 'Come Healing,' from *Old Ideas* by Leonard Cohen;  
on p. 129, 'Underneath the Shadow of Your Wings.' Words and Music by Tom Wuest.  
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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-281-06083-2  
eBook ISBN 978-0-281-07567-6

Typeset by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong  
First printed in Great Britain by Ashford Colour Press  
Subsequently digitally printed in Great Britain

eBook by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong

Produced on paper from sustainable forests

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## *Come Healing*

O gather up the brokenness  
And bring it to me now  
The fragrance of those promises  
You never dared to vow.

The splinters that you carry  
The cross you left behind  
Come healing of the body  
Come healing of the mind . . .

O solitude of longing  
Where love has been confined  
Come healing of the body  
Come healing of the mind.

O see the darkness yielding  
That tore the light apart  
Come healing of the reason  
Come healing of the heart . . .

O let the heavens falter  
And let the earth proclaim:  
Come healing of the altar  
Come healing of the Name.

And let the heavens hear it  
The penitential hymn  
Come healing of the spirit  
Come healing of the limb.

(Leonard Cohen in *Old Ideas*)

# Preface

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The particular focus of this book about inner healing is to assist both clergy and laity in developing greater understanding and skills when praying for those who are seeking the healing of Christ. Thus this book emphasizes how to pray biblically, imaginatively and sensitively for those who are seeking help in their journey towards wholeness.

The book assumes that the reader has an understanding of the healing ministry of Christ in the world through the Church and also that the reader may already be exercising a ministry of prayer. Thus the theological and biblical bases for the healing ministry in the life of the Church are largely assumed. But they are briefly touched upon in the opening chapter and throughout the book whenever it is necessary to provide a framework and setting for healing prayers. Though the case for Christian healing will not be systematically developed, that may be the topic for another book, since there has been little theological reflection about healing in much of the contemporary literature on this topic. This book seeks to fill a gap in the books that have already been written about healing prayer, as most contain few actual examples of prayers for healing.<sup>1</sup>

In the communal and internal life of the Church, worship, teaching and Eucharist typically hold central place, with the ministry of healing as a poor second cousin to all that the Church seeks to offer. Furthermore, because healing has largely been outsourced to the medical profession and psychologists, most churches do not include prayers for healing as part of the normal pastoral ministry of the Church. As a result, many clergy and laity do not know how to do this well.

Moreover, in the Western Church in particular, we do not tend to cultivate a faithful or vibrant life of prayer anyway – let alone praying for healing and deliverance.

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The Church has often become a very functional and pragmatic institution. We provide social services rather than tend the ministries of contemplation and prayer. We conduct religious services that build people up for practical service and well-being rather than develop them for a life of sacrifice, prayer and spiritual discernment.



This book has its roots in my 30-year journey of participating in training clergy and laity for establishing healing teams in churches and para-church organizations in both the minority world (the West) and majority world settings. It has also emerged from training theological students to make healing prayers part of their future pastoral ministry. We are particularly grateful to the many students who, over the past 16 years or so, have participated in inner-healing seminars, both at the Asian Theological Seminary in Manila, Philippines, and at Regent College in Vancouver, Canada. These participants not only theologically and intellectually opened their hearts and minds to the healing ministry, but some also sought healing prayers for their own lives. For their openness and vulnerability, we are deeply grateful. This book is dedicated to these students, who have carried this ministry into many parts of the globe.

We have used the word ‘art’ in the title of this book to convey that healing prayers are a creative activity. While there are careful strategies and skilful practices in healing prayer, there is also much room for imagination, creativity and flexibility. The movement of prayer is multidirectional, for as we respond to a particular person and his or her story and needs, we are also open to the mysterious but accompanying workings of the Spirit, while at the same time we bring our own skills, sensitivities and discernment into the prayer setting. When we engage in prayers for healing, we join with the Lord of the dance. Yet good theology must still guide us and structure our prayers.

Several people have contributed to this book by serving and praying for students in both schools: Dr Athena Gorospe and

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Dr Amanda Tan at the Asian Theological Seminary, and Mr Mike Wallbridge and the Revd Sarah Tillett at Regent College. I also wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Anne White, with whom I trained in schools that prepared clergy and laity to bring the inner-healing ministry into churches in Australia. And I am deeply thankful to my wife, Rita, and friends in Brisbane who over many years regularly prayed for those seeking inner healing.

But special thanks go to Mary Dickau, my teaching assistant at Regent College, who has not only been a great help in running the inner-healing seminars and helping to pray for people seeking help, but who has been inspirational in opening up new ways of prayer. I am also grateful for her participation in the writing of this book. Throughout this book, her voice of prayer, longing and hope will be displayed in a different font, guiding you as you pray for those seeking Christ's healing presence in their lives.

Prayer is, at its very core, the witness of death becoming life. This means that the art of healing prayer is, at least in part, the art of dying to self. We become less, so that Christ can become more within us and in our prayers for another. This sacrificial aspect of praying for others makes our prayers safe, so that the journey towards healing and wholeness is marked by hope and goodness for those whose story we are holding before God. In this way, our prayers become sacraments of God's healing, comfort and provision, which flow from the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus prayer marks the continuing surprise of the abundant life we have in Christ, even in the midst of a broken and pain-filled world. By God's Spirit, our prayers lead us into safe places of shelter and rest as we journey towards our eternal home in God.

Finally, a special thanks to Pieter Kwant of Piquant Agency for placing this book with SPCK and for the good editorial work of our friend and fellow traveller Karen Hollenbeck-Wuest.

*Charles Ringma and Mary Dickau  
Brisbane, Australia, and  
Vancouver, Canada*



# *Introduction*

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This book invites readers to enter the wide spaces of God's restorative love and forgiveness in Christ through the Spirit to bring healing, comfort and wholeness to the world. This ministry of healing is first and foremost a prayer ministry – not a ministry of demand, but rather of expectation. In healing prayer, we ask God in Christ through the Spirit to come with healing grace and power to the person seeking help. Our prayer posture is neither begging nor triumphalistic. Rather, we pray with a faith, love and hope that is rooted in the nature of who God is and in the promises of the biblical story. Thus this ministry is not about what we humans do, although we do play a role in God's healing activity. Some describe our role as being channels of God's love and healing, yet it is possibly better to describe our role as being assistants to the Holy Spirit. Or, to use a different analogy, we seek to discern what God is doing in bringing healing to a particular person, and we pray for and agree with God's gracious activity. This emphasizes that our prayers are not the source of healing, but rather God's presence, through the Spirit, is the source of all healing. Prayer, then, becomes an act of solidarity with God's action among us, rather than wringing from God's seeming reluctant hand what is difficult to attain. Thus presence rather than demand is the gestalt of all healing prayers.

The ministry of inner healing is part of Christ's spacious healing ministry. In joining this ministry, we pray that Christ's healing and restorative presence, through the brooding Holy Spirit, will bring healing and wholeness to the wounded and broken places within us. Our woundedness can be the result of other people's sins against us, our sinning against ourselves, and the brokenness that comes as a result of living in a fallen world and participating in institutions that, though marked by God's common grace, are also characterized by sin and dysfunction. Thus we can be deeply wounded by living in a negative and broken family or being part

of an unhealthy and oppressive social institution. But we can also be wounded by making poor choices that lead to wrongdoing – thereby sinning against ourselves. Thus the inner-healing ministry includes prayers for forgiveness, absolution, deliverance, healing, restoration and infilling as we ask God to bring wholeness to people, rather than merely relief from particular problems.

To say that healing is primarily a prayer ministry does not suggest that other factors do not contribute to the healing process. The healing ministry of the Church recognizes many other dimensions in the healing process, including the use of symbolism and sacramentalism. Thus Scripture, praise, the Eucharist, the laying on of hands and anointing with oil all play a role in the ministry of inner healing. But the basic frame supporting all of these remains prayer, for in prayer we humbly come before God to seek grace and help.

In providing a framework for inner healing, we will outline a variety of prayers that can be appropriated by the reader. These prayers are not normative, but rather suggestive. They are designed as signposts rather than as models, and our concern is not so much with methods as inspiration. For no particular prayer can have universal validity, because as unique people, we pray for others out of our understandings of their settings, personalities, backgrounds and issues. Thus our prayers must always be specific and contextual, as well as intuitive, reflective and creative – and each of us will need to find our own voice as we pray healing prayers.

Though the prayers set out in this book are primarily spoken, we do not believe in ‘word magic’, where we just speak something out and it will be done, or where we claim something aloud and it shall come to pass. Instead, we believe in the performative nature of prayer spoken in faith, hope and love in resonance with God’s will and purpose. We believe in the Spirit accompanying the word, but also in the sovereign freedom of the Spirit. And as we humbly draw near to God through our prayers, we connect the divine with the human.



To guide readers through this book, Chapter 1 will set out basic perspectives regarding the broader healing ministry of the community

## Introduction

of faith and then identify the place of inner healing within that framework. Chapter 2 describes a case study that will provide the focus for the ministry of inner healing. The rest of the book is divided up into three major sections: preparation prayers, healing prayers and pastoral follow-up prayers. Within each of these sections, we will explore important subtopics.

In the section on preparation prayers (Chapter 3), we will provide a set of guidelines for preparing a person for healing prayers and will offer examples of prayers for both the counsellee and the counsellor. We will also explore the importance of discerning prayers (Chapter 5), which involve a careful reflective process about the kind of prayer intervention or other forms of help that may be the most appropriate for the counsellee. Preparation prayers also have to do with the matter of timing. For example, we discern if the person needs more time to be attentive to the Holy Spirit before proceeding to healing prayers. In such a case, we would guide the person seeking healing towards deeper self-reflection, rather than moving directly to getting help and relief.

In the healing prayer section, we will explore many forms and dimensions of prayer, including opening prayers (Chapter 4) and closing prayers (Chapter 12) for the prayer ministry time. We will also discuss prayers of repentance (Chapter 6), forgiveness and absolution (Chapter 7), separation (Chapter 8) and deliverance (Chapter 9), as well as the art of healing prayers (Chapter 10), prayers for the infilling of the Holy Spirit (Chapter 11) and prayers of protection and closure (Chapter 12). While this section focuses specifically on the prayer ministry time, it is important to remember that prayer is central to the whole healing process – the preparation, the healing itself and the follow-up. In the ministry of inner-healing prayer, things are not done to and for a *passive* recipient. Rather, the journey is participatory, and the person seeking healing is invited to pray throughout every phase of the whole process.

The purpose of follow-up prayers (Chapter 13) is to encourage and empower those who are seeking healing to continue to pray as they go forward along the journey towards wholeness. At the same time, the counsellors discern if further pastoral care is needed.

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As we companion others along this costly journey towards wholeness, we will need to open our own lives to the gift of God's healing grace so that we can become available to those seeking restoration. And as others are transformed by God's healing grace in their lives, they often are empowered to pray for healing for others in the future. In this way, the beauty and goodness of God's grace extends further into the world through ever-expanding ripples of new life, hope and transformation.



Holy One,

you have made your peace with the world. Through Jesus Christ, you have reconciled yourself to all of creation. By your Spirit, you are with us, working to reconcile us all to you. Because you are holy, you long to bring your kingdom near, to fulfil your purpose within the new creation, to render in fullness your word of peace. This is your purpose, your divine mercy, and you will accomplish it.

We need to know and live into the fullness of your peace. We have lived as if you were our enemy. We have assumed that our power and authority is your power and authority. We have let sin, brokenness and the lies of the prince of this world define the path for our feet. We confess that we continue to choose darkness instead of light, to hide in fear of you, rather than believe and trust in your desire to draw us near.

O Holy One, open our hearts to the truth, that we might see you in the light of Jesus, who loved you with his whole being. By your Spirit, may we see the world through the eyes of our reconciling Christ, who entrusts us with his ministry of reconciliation for your sake. You who have overcome, this is your desire, your work, your glory.

We make our peace with you, that we might become messengers of your peace. Heal us and heal this world through us. Use our hands to build your new creation. May your kingdom come on earth, as it is in heaven. Amen.

# 1

## *Dimensions of the healing ministry*

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In this chapter we seek to do a number of things. First of all, we remember the many healing themes embedded in the biblical story, where we take note of the comprehensive nature of healing. Healing is not simply the removal of pain or the solving of a problem, but rather an entry into greater wholeness of life through God's grace and goodness.

Second, we trace the healing themes and ministries exercised by the Christian Church over its long journey in history. The diversity and richness of these themes highlight that there is not one single path to healing, but rather many forms of healing and numerous ways in which greater wholeness may come to us. For example, when we are healed from our inner wounding, that healing will flow into our relationships with others. For when we are more at peace within ourselves, we will be less reactive when we relate to others.

Third, we introduce our vision and strategies for praying inner-healing prayers. By focusing on inner healing, we do not mean to imply that this is the *most* important form of healing. Rather, the Church seems to be less familiar with this form of healing prayers. Most church formularies, such as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>1</sup> and *An Australian Prayer Book*,<sup>2</sup> speak of the importance of the healing ministry of the Church, yet they give scant attention to inner-healing prayers.

### *Healing themes in the biblical story*

In order to understand the specific themes of healing throughout the biblical narrative, we first must recognize the central narrative scheme of the Bible: Creation, chaos or the Fall and re-creation.

Creation speaks of God's participation in all that exists and heralds the goodness of our world. The theme of chaos, or the Fall, speaks about humanity's disobedience, sinfulness and woundedness in all its personal and social dimensions. This means not only that I sin against others and that others sin against me, but also that I live in social conditions that may harm me. The dark side of a culture or the psychopathology of an institution may affect me in ways that call for healing. Thus our need for healing comes not only from personal relationships going astray and the negative work of satanic forces, but also from the brokenness of our world. Consequently, chaos, or the Fall, constitutes the precondition of our need for healing and restoration. The work of re-creation, redemption and restoration is the movement of healing that leads us from brokenness into wholeness through God's provision for us in Christ. Therefore, healing is not a sub-theme in the biblical story, but rather the key to the new creation that lies at the heart of the mystery of the in-breaking reign of God. Thus healing is not only personal, but also institutional and societal as well as eschatological, for it anticipates the healing of all things. Moreover, healing is not restricted to certain parts of the biblical narrative, but is woven throughout the whole mosaic of Scripture.

### **The Old Testament biblical mosaic of healing**

One does not need to travel very far into the Bible before one meets the astounding declaration, 'I am the LORD who heals you' (Exodus 15.26). The setting for this description of the nature of Yahweh has to do with the provision of sweet water to sustain life (v. 25), the call to obey God's ways (v. 26) and the promise of a life of freedom and blessing without the diseases brought on Egypt (v. 26). Clearly, God's vision for healing is much wider than overcoming a personal physical ailment. The healing vision here is communal, life-sustaining, preventative and suggests a general sense of well-being – perhaps best summed up in the word *shalom*, which recurs throughout the Old Testament.

The theme of healing is also important in the prophetic writings. Perhaps the fullest articulation occurs in Isaiah 61.1–4, where personal and communal healing ('bind up the broken-hearted' and

‘comfort all who mourn’, giving them ‘the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit’) is complemented by social freedom (‘proclaim liberty to captives’), which results in social transformation (‘they shall build up the ancient ruins’). In this vision of healing, the promise of wholeness is both personal and communal, impacting one’s internal life as well as one’s social conditions.

While there are instances in the Old Testament of the healing of individuals (2 Kings 20.5; Jeremiah 17.14; Psalm 6.2), the broader vision is for personal and communal restoration (Hosea 6.1; Jeremiah 33.6; Isaiah 6.10; Ezekiel 34.16). The Old Testament has in view a healing of all relationships and a life of communal solidarity and care. This vision of healing brings with it particular challenges for those living in the self-preoccupied and individualistic Western world – including the Church – where healing is primarily thought of as personal relief from sickness. Yet the Wisdom literature of the biblical narrative traces a rich tapestry of the healing actions of Yahweh, identifying physical healing (Psalms 6.2; 41.3), spiritual healing (Psalm 41.4), general well-being and encouragement (Proverbs 12.1; 16.24), inner healing (Psalm 147.3), and communal deliverance and restoration (Psalm 107.19–20).

### **Key New Testament themes**

The New Testament is equally comprehensive in its understanding of the healing ministry of Christ, which the early Christian communities carried forward into the world through the power of the Spirit. Though the New Testament builds on the Old Testament, much of the contemporary writing about the healing ministry neglects the Old Testament and uses the New Testament as the starting point for understanding Christian healing.<sup>3</sup>

Luke returns to Isaiah’s vision of healing (61.1–4) in his Gospel (4.17–19). This healing manifesto becomes the framework for the entire Gospel and differentiates the ministry of Jesus from that of John the Baptist (Luke 7.22–23). Luke recounts many narratives about the healing of individuals (Luke 4.38–39; 5.12–13; 6.6–11; 7.1–10), and he clearly defines the mission of Jesus and his disciples as one of proclamation and healing (Luke 6.17–19; 9.1–2). Luke clarifies the healing ministry in a number of ways. He

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