

THE  
**HEALING  
BREAKTHROUGH**

---

CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE  
OF FAITH FOR HEALING

**RANDY CLARK**



**Chosen**

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

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I dedicate *The Healing Breakthrough* to the memory of Dr. Charles Price, whose book *The Real Faith* I have read many times.

I also dedicate *The Healing Breakthrough* to John Wimber, Omar Cabrera and Blaine Cook, who first modeled for me the connection between understanding what God is doing in a meeting and faith for healing and miracles.

Finally, I dedicate *The Healing Breakthrough* to Bill Johnson, who is sensitive to moving from his faith to the faith of God. Bill models living in faith, by faith, always desiring to increase the measure of faith he has.

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## FOREWORD

Randy Clark has been a close personal friend for almost twenty years. I met him in my quest for more of God. The stories of his impact in Toronto and elsewhere around the world had put a cry in my heart that could not be quenched with theory or ritual. All I hungered for was God Himself. I wanted Him to do something in my life that would change me from the inside out. I knew that the fruit of such a touch would be for me to have a greater impact on the world around me, which seemed like a wonderful benefit. It became obvious to me that Randy was a “carrier” of that kind of grace.

We met. And quite to my surprise, God gave me favor in his eyes. He came to Bethel Church here in Redding, California, and the rest is history. His deposit was not just for me; it was for our church family. Some things are too great to be given to an individual. They must be imparted to the Body as a whole.

Since Randy’s first visit, healings and miracles have become a normal part of our life as a church. Interestingly, most of the miracles take place in public, where the people are. I cannot help but think that this is what Jesus modeled with His ministry in the marketplace and what He implied when He said for His disciples to “go into all the world.” In other words, go where

the people are. What many may not know, however, is that Randy is the primary figure in igniting and fueling that passion and gifting for healing that happens through Bethel's ministry.

One of my greatest joys in life is to join with Randy in traveling the earth in ministry, doing various conferences and healing schools and ministering in local churches. We are together around six to ten times a year, each event lasting for days, with many services a day. I say this only to emphasize that I have heard Randy teach and model the concepts in this book for years, and they never get old. They are absolutely priceless! I know of no one alive, or even anyone in Church history, who ministered healing with as clear an understanding of the subject.

But let me be clear. I am not talking about theory. The goal is not to have a great classroom discussion on healing. I am talking about the kinds of truths that release multitudes into their miracles while equipping them to bring healing to others.

*The Healing Breakthrough* might be the most important book I have ever seen on the subject of healing. This is quite a statement when you realize how many excellent books there are with both insights and stories of miracles filling their pages. Yet I make this statement for three reasons.

First, in my opinion, Randy really is an apologist. He has a grasp of Scripture that is rare. Even his stories are filled with revelation of Scripture. His vast knowledge of Church history enables him to see where healing movements in the past have failed and what parts of Scripture were neglected. He is also able to dissect the objections people have to the healing ministry with grace, yet with the biblical boldness needed to follow the example Jesus gave us when He said, "Greater works than these shall you do."

The second reason I say this is that Randy has no desire for recognition, fame or glory. I see this reality in and out of the

pulpit. His passion is to be faithful to his call and to bring glory to the name of Jesus. This is most pronounced in his insistence on equipping the people of God to do the work of the ministry. He refuses to do things that would cause a congregation to become dependent on him. His transparency in the process of a healing meeting is both disarming and educational. He makes everyone realize that they can do it, too. That is an outcome that is rare indeed.

The final reason is that what Randy teaches in this book will save those wanting to see God use them in healing from years and years of heartache. I honestly don't remember any book or teaching series that addresses the questions Randy does so thoroughly in *The Healing Breakthrough*. There are still many believers who have objections to praying for the sick, although their numbers are decreasing. Those objections are addressed right here in these pages.

The healing ministry is a ministry of the cross. It has great highs and deep lows. There are wonderful victories and very challenging disappointments. The healing ministry is not an easy road to take. But because of the journey Randy has been taking for decades, we can glean from his insights and experiences and be that much better equipped for the days ahead, bringing to Jesus the glory that He alone deserves.

Beliefs have behaviors attached to them. And I cannot imagine anyone who believes the life-giving truths contained in this book will not experience the *breakthrough* mentioned in the title. These insights will help readers step into their destiny of ministering to the sick with increasing faith, understanding and authority.

You now hold in your hand a treasure, worth its weight in gold. Literally. Please read it, live it and keep it on your shelf as a reference guide for the years to come. And by all means, let us give ourselves to see the name of Jesus lifted high in the



earth because we did what He commanded us to do: “Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8 NASB).

Bill Johnson, senior leader,  
Bethel Church, Redding, California;  
author, *When Heaven Invades Earth*  
and *The Power That Changes the World*

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I thank my wife, DeAnne, for allowing me to write during the too-small amount of time that I am home. DeAnne loves God and His Kingdom, always putting them first during our forty years together.

Finally, I thank my personal assistant, Vicki Hennedy, for her valuable help in keeping me focused, and for her efforts to keep me on target in meeting my deadlines.

# INTRODUCTION

## How Healing Moved from Rare to Regular

In the heat of a crowded room, the sound of prayer was rising. Several teenagers sixteen years old and up were present, along with one twenty-three-year-old who, just a few weeks earlier, had been the most infamous drug pusher in the community. Several of these young new believers had been buying their drugs from this pusher, who is now pushing the Gospel for Jesus. Only a few weeks old in their faith at the time, all of those present in the room were engaged in a great fight for healing. These young ones were involved in the great Jesus movement. They were part of the several million young people who came to Christ in the late 1960s and early '70s, in the revival that seemed to start among the hippies and then spread out to other young people in North America and Europe.

These new believers had been delivered themselves from alcoholism and drug addictions, and a few of them had been healed. What was the great cause for which they were now crying

out with such intensity? What united them in such abandoned expectation, such full and passionate prayer? They had been praying for almost half an hour for one person, a middle-aged man named Johnny Metcalf, who had severe cerebral palsy.

I was present in that prayer meeting, and Johnny was in our midst. We knew all things were possible as we prayed for his healing. We had not been taught unbelief, since most of us had been unchurched until a few weeks earlier. And I had known Johnny since I was a little boy. I used to be afraid of him. Johnny walked with great difficulty, swinging from side to side just to keep his balance as he tried to work his partially paralyzed legs. He could not speak a word. At best, his attempts at communication sounded like unutterable groans.

Johnny tried to go to church several times a week. He would hitchhike to the small country church I had attended as a boy, but he had a ride every Sunday to his home church, which I joined when I was sixteen. I had seen Johnny come into the services in the wintertime with snow-covered pant legs from where he had fallen. Yet, in spite of such terrible handicaps from birth, Johnny loved God. He knew that one day he would be handicapped no longer. He knew Jesus had died for him and had forgiven his sins, and he knew Jesus could deal with his sicknesses and birth defects. Yet Johnny primarily put his hope for healing into the next life.

The revival had caused our faith to rise, however, and to believe that all things were possible. We not only believed it; we expected it. So for about thirty minutes we had been beseeching heaven in that meeting, crying out for Johnny's miracle. It did not happen.

Were we disappointed? Yes! Johnny left this world the way he entered it—severely handicapped from cerebral palsy. But right now Johnny is no longer handicapped. He has entered into the joy that truly was set before him in the Gospel. He is

free to speak clearly, free to run and jump, free never to be sick or grow old or weak again, for all eternity.

At this point in my Christian life, I have some understanding about why Johnny Metcalf was usually the first person during midweek services to stand and give his testimony of praise to God. Though no one could understand a word he tried to say, those few unintelligible syllables spoke volumes to those of us who witnessed Johnny's faith and dedication to his Savior. It would be another quarter of a century before I began to see people with strokes healed. (Strokes are similar in nature to the cause of cerebral palsy, brain injury often resulting from a lack of oxygen to the brain.) And though it has been a total of 45 years since that night when we prayed for Johnny, I still have not seen someone be healed of cerebral palsy. But I still pray. I still am encouraged.

Why am I encouraged? Because it took 35 years and many prayers for stroke victims before I witnessed a breakthrough. When it happened, it happened suddenly. In one 24-hour period I witnessed three healings of people paralyzed by strokes. One man and woman were healed in the same service. We had a preservice prayer time for the terminally ill, the paralyzed, those who could not walk without aid, and the blind and deaf. During this hour of preservice prayer and the hour of worship that followed it, my team and I prayed for many people.

Along with a few others, I split my time between the two stroke victims. The man was not a Christian. His wife had told me in the morning service that her husband was coming to church for the first time in his life that night. He had not been a good husband; he had been unfaithful, violent and an alcoholic. The woman was a Roman Catholic. In Brazil, great prejudice exists between Catholics and evangelicals (the Brazilian equivalent of our Protestants). It took much courage for this Catholic woman to come to a Pentecostal Evangelical church.

She came with her family and wore a veil over her head, clearly marking her out as the Catholic in our midst.

Both these people had similar problems resulting from their strokes. Both had a claw hand on the partially paralyzed left side of their body. The woman's stroke had also taken away her ability to speak. She could not make her mouth say what her brain was thinking.

For about two hours our team had been praying. I had to leave them so I could prepare to step into the pulpit to preach and minister. As my intern was putting the mic around my ear and positioning it, I looked out over the crowd and was shocked at what I saw. The unsaved man paralyzed from his stroke was clapping his hands. His claw hand was now normal, and he was singing praise to his newly found Savior, Jesus Christ. The Catholic woman was also clapping normal hands together. The claw of paralysis was gone from her body as well, and she was singing. Her speech had been restored. After 35 years of never seeing one stroke victim healed, I saw two healed in a single service.

The next day at another church in Rio de Janeiro, we saw a man who had been paralyzed for many years get out of his wheelchair and walk after prayer for healing. He, too, had been a stroke victim. After so many years going by with not one stroke victim healed, in 24 hours three had been healed. What was different?

I believe one of the differences was that we were hearing stories of God raising the dead in Mozambique from our friends Rolland and Heidi Baker. I had the privilege of interviewing the first two Mozambican pastors who had raised the dead, Johnny and Rego. This was at a time when there had not been hundreds raised from the dead, as there have been now, but only a handful. I knew that if God raised the dead after they had been deceased for over an hour, He had to rebuild not only all of their

brain cells, but all of the cells in their bodies. Understanding the implications of this miracle changed what I truly believed was not only possible, but what was probable. Even more than probable—it actually was happening in Mozambique.

I wish I could say that the healing of stroke victims continued to happen on a regular basis, but that has not been my experience. Miracles still are not normative, although they occur more regularly than they once did. Healing, on the other hand, has become a normative experience. By way of definition, healings can happen naturally, although God can speed them up to happen much more quickly than normal, or they can happen supernaturally and be directly related to God's power. Miracles are more than healings and more than a quickening of the healing process. They cause something missing to appear, as in a creative miracle, or they cause something that is there but should not be there to disappear, as in a tumor disappearing. Both healings and miracles can be supernatural, regardless of how they happen.

For me, healing has become normative—an imperative from the very emphasis of Scripture itself. On a personal level, I saw this standard grow incrementally over time. It has not always been this way. What happened to change healing from being rare to regular? A couple things happened at a couple different times. In March 1984 I saw more healings than I had seen in my lifetime. This was when a Vineyard church team led by Blaine Cook came to my Baptist church. After the Vineyard team's visit, my church and I began to see healings on a regular basis. Every month we would see people get healed. Considering that prior to this visit I could count on both hands all the healings I had seen in my life, it was a major improvement.

The Vineyard team taught my church and me how to recognize words of knowledge, which resulted in some dramatic changes for us. Another teaching that brought us dramatic change was how to pray for those with physical needs. We

learned to use a relational prayer model for healing that included five specific steps. In addition to what we learned, the activation of words of knowledge and the impartation for healing were extremely important in our resultant breakthrough.

The combination of these three foundational things—recognizing words of knowledge, using the Five-Step Prayer Model<sup>1</sup> and receiving an activation/impartation—was so important that over thirty years later, I continue teaching them through Global Awakening’s schools and conferences.<sup>2</sup> It is vital that we learn the ways of God, especially when it comes to the causal relationship between words of knowledge, faith and gifts of healing and/or miracles. This causal relationship becomes evident to those who learn to recognize words of knowledge, who have learned to cooperate with God through the relational Five-Step Prayer Model, and who have received activation or impartation in ministry times. These things are all tied together.

Though the initial experience in 1984 shaped much of what characterizes my ministry of healing and impartation, an even greater breakthrough came a decade later. Beginning in January 1994, healing started to become somewhat normative. This was the occasion of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring in Toronto, when I visited there to do a four-day meeting that turned into the longest protracted meeting in North American history—six nights a week for twelve and a half years. On the first night we saw a woman healed of a terminal condition. Many more healings also began to occur. Healing was becoming a reality every week, or so it seemed.

Then, after January 1995 healing became fully normative. It became a reality at almost every meeting where we prayed for the sick. Not only did it become normative; over time the kinds of healings became greater. In 2009 the healing of people with chronic pain or limited range of motion due to surgically implanted material began.



It is my assumption that healing should be standard for the Church, even though sometimes it is not. We need to address the most basic and fundamental question of why healings occur. That is my focus in these pages. Since 1984, I have been involved continuously in the ministry of praying for the sick, a practice that affords a relatively extensive breadth of experience. I have also spent over 28 years trying to gain a better understanding of the variables that can affect the probability of healings occurring, as well as what factors create an atmosphere for healing.

Healings occur at different times. Sometimes they occur when I am on the platform during a service. Other times they occur during my one-on-one ministry time off the platform. Healings also occur when my ministry team members pray on their own. I have seen healings follow words of knowledge, and I have also seen them occur spontaneously during worship. I have seen people healed when they try to do what they previously could not do. I have seen people healed through watching a video that shows other people being healed. Sometimes the people God heals and how He heals them surprises me.

These “surprise” healings I have seen are the first of three reasons that I believe the critics of healing are incorrect. In light of these surprise healings, the critics’ naturalistic explanations and placebo explanations are simply untenable. (Those are based on the humanistic understanding that it is faith that heals, not divine power.) The second reason the critics are mistaken is that for certain types of healings or miracles, the internal body-mind-spirit mechanism clearly cannot be used as an explanation. This is true for the phenomenon of raising the dead, especially where the person has been dead for more than an hour. The third reason is the inconsistent prayer results when one person prays for different people. For example, someone might pray for ten different people and see nothing happen to six of them, while two receive complete healing and two receive

partial healing. This causes us to recognize that healing is not dependent on the person who prays, but rather on the power or energy of God that works through him or her (although not necessarily on a consistent basis).

One of these surprise healings happened in a city in Colorado where I was conducting a meeting. A woman came who was not expecting a healing and did not even believe in healing through prayers in Jesus' name. In fact, she had come to the School of Healing and Impartation we were holding (now called *Kingdom Foundations*) to mock me and criticize my meetings and ministry. The sister of a local professional, she stood in the back as a critical observer. Right there in the back—despite her attitude—she suddenly was healed. The woman's brother, a believer, shared this story with me a few days after her healing occurred. From that point on, her criticism ceased. Critics who say that "the power of suggestion" could be an explanation for some healings cannot hold their ground in a case like this, where the woman who got healed was not even open to healing in the first place.

I have met several people who reported that they were raised from the dead, and I have interviewed their families to confirm the reports. I have also visited villages that were once Muslim, but are now predominantly Christian because the people in the village confirmed reports of the dead being raised. After interviewing the humble people whom God used to raise the dead, and after seeing the effects of such miracles on a nation like Mozambique, I can say without a doubt that a naturalistic explanation of faith as a placebo simply does not suffice to explain all the relevant evidence.<sup>3</sup> In Mozambique alone, ten thousand new churches have been started and one million people have accepted Jesus due to healings and miracles, especially the raising of the dead.<sup>4</sup>

Even for me, with my many years of experience, healings can be inconsistent. For example, two brothers came for prayer in

a meeting in southern India. Neither of them was able to walk due to having the same condition in their legs. I prayed for both and one was healed, while the other showed no improvement. There may have been a difference in each brother's expectations, but no one can really know the inner workings of their minds regarding healing. In this case, however, I believe what was most important in the one brother's healing was my faith as the person ministering. Many times, it is not the faith of the person in need of healing that determines whether a healing occurs; it is the faith of the person who is ministering that often is determinative. Both these brothers were Hindus, so my faith as the one praying was the determinative factor. But it is interesting to note that my level of faith was the same for each brother at the start. In fact, it was higher for the second brother after I saw that the first one was healed. My expectation was that the second brother would also be healed, yet he was not—which demonstrates that God's power is beyond our human expectation or our faith level.

Another example of this inconsistency dates back to 1984. John Wimber had allowed me to shadow him at several healing meetings. My instructions were to watch and listen, and at the end of the meeting to ask John any questions I had about what I observed. One night at a Methodist church in Houston, almost every person John prayed for was healed. The following night no one he prayed for was healed.

At the end of the second night, I said, "John, I have a question."

"Let me tell you what your question is," John responded. "You want to know why everyone was healed last night and no one was healed tonight, don't you?"

"Yes!" I said.

"You don't get it, do you?" John said. "Last night when everyone I prayed for was healed, I didn't go to bed thinking I was some great healer, or that I was somebody. And tonight when

I go to bed, I'm not going to be thinking I'm a great failure. I didn't have any more faith last night than I did tonight, and I don't have any more sin in my life tonight than I did last night. Tomorrow I will get up and pray for the sick again. All I did both nights was to stick my fat hand out and say, 'Come, Holy Spirit; I bless what I see You doing.'"

This dialogue with John was a turning point for me. I realized that the answer to seeing a breakthrough in healing was not some secret I needed to learn. Neither was it based on the merit of the person praying. It was wrapped in mystery. Yet as John demonstrated night after night, it was also related to faithfulness and our willingness to persevere in ministering God's love to those in need of healing.

In the missiological context, non-Christians often have not heard the Gospel, know nothing about the Christian faith (other than that it is not their faith), have not previously seen anyone healed in Jesus' name and have no theology of healing. Why do more people get healed in this context than in what would seem like a more conducive atmosphere—a Christian church service in a denomination that believes in healing, where people have heard the testimonies of others whom they know personally being healed, and where their faith for healing has been building through solid biblical teachings on the subject?

I believe the answer is the overriding desire of God to advance the Kingdom of God through salvation, which includes healing. For example, the greatest number of conversions I have ever seen happened during a meeting in India. One hundred thousand persons were gathered at the meeting, mostly Hindus. Fifty thousand of these were healed in one night, and thirty thousand accepted Jesus. This example begs the question of sovereignty in relation to healing, but it also relates sovereignty to soteriology, or the study of salvation. Another way to sum that up more simply is that where there is the preaching to people who have

not heard the Gospel, the power to heal is present in an even greater degree, especially if the minister's theology includes the expectation of great outpouring of the Spirit on all flesh in the latter days. In this way sovereignty (God's freedom to act) is related to soteriology (the study of salvation). Where the power of the Holy Spirit causes many healings, it also softens the hearts of those who witness this compassionate power of God. It is true that God's goodness brings us to repentance!

Though healing is wrapped in mystery, we are beginning to understand some things about it better as we seek to understand the "ways of God" better. As Moses prayed in Exodus 33:13, "If you are pleased with me, *teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you*" (emphasis added). Discovering the ways of God is related to knowing Him better and is key to finding favor with Him. The ministry of healing is much more successful when we stop focusing on trying to get God to bless what *we* are doing, and instead, we realize what *He* is doing and bless it. This is based on revelation from God out of our intimacy with God, and it is rooted in the operation of His gifts, which are what I call "gracelets" of His divine energy.

I call the gifts gracelets because they are tangible expressions of God's grace to a person. Grace is active, not just dismissive; it is enablement, not just forgiveness undeserved. Grace is also a demonstration of God's power when it is undeserved. Some commentators also refer to the charismata as gracelets. These are tangible, visible expressions in a small way of God's great ocean of grace.

Perhaps God has determined to link healing to the Gospel, intentionally making healing a sign that confirms it. Or, more accurately and biblically, perhaps healing is part of the Gospel and is included in the good news that Jesus bore our sins, sicknesses and sorrows on the cross. More good news is that the energy of the Kingdom of God has broken into our time

and space, and that the energy of heaven has begun to come to earth.<sup>5</sup>

It is important to realize, however, that even Jesus is seen connecting words to the release of this energy in some cases, and He tells us the importance of our speech in relationship to the release of God's power to work healings and miracles. I will talk more about that concept and many others pertinent to healing ministry in part II of the book. In part I just ahead, we will look at some teachings that hinder the ministry of healing—obstacles that I see as theological “rubble” we need to clear away so that we can build a solid wall of faith for healing. We will deal with removing the rubble first, and then we will begin looking at the things that build faith and create an atmosphere more conducive to a healing breakthrough.

## PART I

---

# Obstacles to Creating an Atmosphere of Faith for Healing

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy  
the devil's work.

1 John 3:8

Several years ago I was in Minneapolis–Saint Paul, speaking at the International Charismatic Lutheran Conference. During one of the sessions, I felt led to speak on the obstacles to faith and healing. I drew upon the passage from Nehemiah where the people first had to clear away the rubble from the fallen places before they could rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. Using this story as a typological picture of the many issues that make faith in healing hard for people to have, I delivered an extemporaneous message on the subject. Deciding to “clear the rubble,” I dealt with these challenges one by one. That is what I want to do in this part of the book—clear away the challenges that get in the way of people having faith in healing.

In the chapters just ahead, I will discuss what I call the rubble arguments about healing. One of them is Paul's "thorn in the flesh." Another is the issue of the relationship between God's sovereignty and healing, as expressed in the different worldviews the Church has embraced throughout its history.

I also will challenge the viewpoint I often heard in seminary, that superior faith is not dependent on signs and wonders. I will address the issue of how hype undermines true faith, and I will deal with the teaching that healing is not normative.

Of course, the big boulder we need to remove amongst the rubble is the argument that the gifts of healing and working of miracles ended with the canonization of the Bible. This argument would imply logically that there is no one today whom we could refer to as a healer or worker of miracles.

In addition, I will discuss a viewpoint that is actually stronger in Catholicism than in Protestantism, although many Protestants still believe it—the idea that "this sickness in my body is my cross to bear."

A further piece of rubble I find that often has to be removed all around the world is the way people confuse emotionalism with faith or praying through. And finally, I will deal with liberalism. This worldview does not believe that anything supernatural really occurred in the Bible or in history. It is based on an understanding of reality that cannot accept the supernatural, and it had its origins in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific views that saw the world as a machine that ran on the laws of nature. Its proponents were convinced that those laws could not be broken without doing violence to reality.

These are the pieces of theological rubble that stand in the way of so many people receiving healing. Let's clear them away one by one, and then go on to build a wall of faith for healing.



# 1

## Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

Remember the *wonderful works* He has done, His *miracles*.

1 Chronicles 16:12 NRSV, emphasis added

I have been in the ministry for forty-five years. I spent thirty of those years pastoring a total of seven local churches, three of which my wife, DeAnne, and I planted. During all these years, I have come across few beliefs that are as damaging to the ministry of healing as the belief that sickness is a thorn in the flesh that God sends to make us more holy or keep us humble.

Throughout my years of ministry, I have sat by the hospital beds of many people who could not believe for healing because they misunderstood Paul's thorn in the flesh. Instead of fighting the good fight of faith, these people accepted their sickness as coming from God. How can someone pray in faith, asking God to take away an illness He has sent? This is the faulty logic behind the teaching that Paul's thorn in the flesh was an illness sent by God.

When I wanted to pray for a person's healing in some of the churches I pastored in my younger days, I would be told, "No, Pastor, just pray that I'll be strong in this time of sickness, and that I'll know God's grace is sufficient." On other occasions I would be told, "Pastor, remember that even Paul wasn't healed when he asked for it; he was told God's grace would be sufficient."

From the time I was a small child, I can remember people using 2 Corinthians 12:1–10 as the answer to why God did not heal them. Let's look at this passage and its connection to healing.

I must go on boasting. Although there is nothing to be gained, I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell. I will boast about a man like that, but I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say. To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:1–10 NIV1984

First, note that Paul was given this “thorn” to keep him from “becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations” (verse 7). Few of us have had such surpassingly great revelations that we were not even sure if we were in or out of our bodies at the time. Thus, we are hardly candidates to receive a “thorn” like Paul’s to keep us from becoming conceited.

Second, Paul calls his thorn a “messenger from Satan” (verse 7). This would be a very odd reference to sickness or disease. A better explanation for the term *messenger* in this passage would be a person, fallen angel or demon who carried a message from Satan. This would fit well if Paul is dealing in this passage with the Judaisers from Jerusalem. These Judaisers may have referred to themselves in such a way that Paul calls them “super apostles” (not meaning it as a flattering term). They also had made critical remarks against Paul that would have been humbling.

Third, of the few references to thorns in the Old Testament, the only three that refer to thorns in the body do not refer to sickness at all, but to human enemies. That makes it even more likely that Paul’s thorn in the flesh, which has so often been interpreted as physical sickness or disease, is in fact referring to a person or persons. Two of these Old Testament passages refer to thorns in the side, and one to thorns in the eye, so perhaps that is why Paul chose to say “thorn in the flesh,” which would take people’s minds back to all three references:

But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and *thorns in your sides*. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live.

Numbers 33:55, emphasis added

Then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and *thorns in*

*your eyes*, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you.

Joshua 23:13, emphasis added

Now therefore I tell you that I will not drive them out before you; they will be [*thorns*] *in your sides* and their gods will be a snare to you.

Judges 2:3 NIV1984, emphasis added

These verses make it clear that the thorn referenced in Paul's Bible, the Old Testament, represented not sickness but people—specifically adversaries. Having once been a leading rabbi, Paul would have known this because he would have had great knowledge of the Old Testament.

This interpretation of Paul's "thorn in the flesh" is not my opinion alone. Many commentators agree with this position, as well as several healing ministers and revivalists such as F. F. Bosworth, Michael Brown and others.<sup>1</sup> In light of this interpretation, for people to think that Paul's thorn refers to sickness and to think that they also might have such a thorn is theological rubble that stands in the way of their healing.