

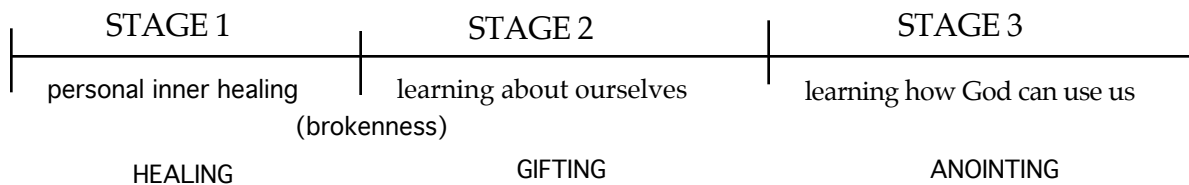


JEHOVAH RAPHA

Maturity in Christ

After making our initial commitment to Christ we all begin a journey of understanding the ways of God with and through us. This journey should herald a goal of spiritual maturity. But for many of us it merely brings maturity of years. Even though all of us have a personal duty to grow in Christ, few of us do this journey successfully.

In many cases God waits for us to come to Him in openness, to invite Him to show us our sin and disorder – something many of us are reluctant to permit Him to do. But if we are truly honest with ourselves and are willing to walk this path with Christ after our allegiance to Him, we would most likely go through 3 stages:



God has very wisely tied our maturing in His Son to our ability to exercise spiritual gifting - children should not play with loaded guns. Therefore, it is unrealistic to become a 'super-saint' until first we have let go of all that stands between us and our deeper intimacy with Christ. These areas of blockage will include issues from our past, our baggage, our relationships, our attitudes and our spiritual nature. All of these areas of our life can easily become damaged.

In addition, we must all prove to the Lord we can be trusted with His gift of spiritual gifting, something few of us ever move into. For the more powerful (and needful) of spiritual gifts are those that have the greatest possibility of abuse – those gifts that speak Christ to the world – knowledge, prophecy, and discernment, etc. Only a consistent growing in maturity in Christ, together with a proven track record of allowing God to work through us in small things will allow us to move into true spiritual anointing.

In the Old Testament there is a gradual unfolding of hylomorphic human wholeness, centred on human spirit and focused in several key Biblical words. These words in the Hebrew Scriptures are xwr ruah and vpn nephesh and in the New Testament pneuma pneuma and quce psuche. These words speak of divine breath in human life, imago dei, or put into contemporary thought, human spirit. Our spirit is the focus of our animating into life in both our core being and in our intellect. We are all spiritual creatures, and without this aspect of our nature we would not be alive and would not be human.

By the time we are born we are already in sin, with all its subsequent damage. Yet God reached out from early times to all of us by giving us a lifeline, from beginning a promise of wholeness, and then in Christ

to be a tool to glorify Him. He sees us through His promise of apr rophe, our wholeness (Ex 15.26). A precursor for spiritual maturity is that we find the wholeness promised to us in Scripture.

The Biblical Concept of Rapha

The Hebrew Jehovah ROPE/RAPHA in its Semitic word stem was 'the mender: one who sews together, to repair a piece of torn cloth'. The Biblical commentators of the OT have traditionally translated the word Rapha 'to heal'. But this is awkward when applied to references like 'undrinkable salt water' (2Kg 2.22) and a 'broken potter's wheel' (Jer 19.11).

More recently it has been suggested we look again at the original root and instead of the simple 'heal', we should see in the root rapa 'to restore, make whole' (Brown, M., Israel's Divine Healer 1995: 29). This fits far more comfortably with the 'healing' of a sick body (2Kg 20.5), 'repairing' a broken altar (1Kg 18.30), 'restoring' a drought-stricken and locust-infested land (2Chron 7.14), 'making wholesome' undrinkable bitter water (2Kg 2.21-22), 'mending' of the earth's fissures (Ps 60.2), 'fixing' smashed pieces of pottery (Jer 19.11) and the 'recovery' of mildewed infected houses (Lev 14.48).

This is the concept behind Exodus 15.26 'I am the Lord your restorer, the One who makes you whole'. Such a meaning takes the promise of God beyond the simple mending of broken diseased bodies, into the realm of the physio-pneumatic (physical/spiritual) nature of people, promising us all wholeness in every area of our life at every level, though from our inner spiritual core. The impact of such restoring for us, and those around us, will give life to what is dry and barren (Ezk 47.6-12). We are healed within ourselves, healed in our relationships with others, and healed in Christ.

From God's perspective this is accomplished by our being 'stitched together', not just into one whole piece of still-worn old cloth, but for us to also be 'stitched into Jehovah'. The clear implication of this phrase Jehovah-Rapha is that it is only as we are 'sewn back' into relationship with our God that it is possible for us to find personal, true wholeness. Put another way, as we seek to deepen our relationship with Christ we find both wholeness in our personality and healing in our body and relationships. The medical model of modern medicine can often heal the body but it remains incapable of making us whole. For our wholeness can only be found in deepening unity and oneness with our Maker-Creator-Redeemer.

Our Journey of Healing

For Christians, the real problem we are faced with Biblically is that we see a large number of recorded healings in Scripture. But we see very little at all of what happened to these folk subsequently. How often must Mary Magdala have wept, after Jesus freed her from the seven demons, and accepted her into His inner circle? (Lk 8.2) Or where is it recorded about all the subsequent struggles the Gadarene demoniac must have had finding his place in society having been cast out for so long? (Mk 5.2) Or the man healed whom Jesus told not to sin any more - did he subsequently fall again? What choices did he make after encountering Jesus?

Scripture has no complete case histories of healing journeys that all of these people had to make. All we read about are the highlights, not the battles that followed as they grew into their healing. In effect we only ever read of the 'spiritual surgery' done by our Lord or His disciples, and there is very little recorded at all of the inner healing journey that followed. Through our own human experience we must all fill in the gaps, but why are we so unwilling to do a journey for Christ and ourselves?

One obstacle might be that as Christians we have been seduced by the medical model to such a degree that we are unwilling to look again at the whole issue of healing from God's perspective. On the one hand we expect things to be instant, and on the other we do not equate our need for wholeness as something being offered by God. We do not even expect God to give us wholeness, but we do presume on doctors to heal us. Maybe, also, because Scripture does not give us a comprehensive 'technique' or 'theology' of healing and its wholeness, we do not try to find one, even though God longs to teach us how we should heal one another (Acts 1.24)?

There will always be a place for surgery and drug therapy, but both of these bring their own side effects. If we can successfully learn to co-operate more with the Holy Spirit there will frequently be an alternative with God. As Christians, especially where the medical model is failing us, we can believe that the Creator remains the best healer. We believe God not only wants to show us how to bring people greater wholeness through His Holy Spirit, but also expects this to be the church's primary source for wholeness and Christ-likeness. The key would seem to be that we begin to hear the voice of God clearly and understand about the spiritual world (Prov 20.15, Jer 33.2ff).

Healing must become a journey, not just a medical event. Instant healing is the hallmark of Christ's public ministry while on earth, though what is often not seen is the more subtle though far more significant work in many ways that He was doing gradually in His disciples' lives over the three plus years He worked with and taught them. It is as though Christ had one healing model for the pagan world to demonstrate His uniqueness (signs and wonders) and another discipleship model 'from the inside out' for His followers.

Outer physical healing was a demonstration for the pagan world, whilst inner healing was the journey for the church. We believe both should be allowed to co-inhabit in contemporary church. The journey approach may well need to be the one we adopt simply because the instant approach does not appear to work for everyone. Many will experience instant healings at various times but wholeness will be a journey. This is what is traditionally described in the church as sanctification.

It took Jesus three years to begin getting His disciples into shape, and with no one was this more of a struggle than with Peter. He was singled out by Christ as a natural leader, but he had serious flaws in his personality. His working class rough north country Galilean accent did not help. He was true blue-collar, and was possibly older than the other disciples and certainly married. He was impulsive, though devoted, and he had spiritual baggage enough to allow himself to be Satan's spokesman (Mk 14.70, Mk 1.30, Mt 4.18, Mk 14.29, Mk 8.33).

Even in his later ministry he failed to stand up to his convictions, but enough healing took place at Jesus' hand, for Christ to describe him as the 'rock' of the new Christian community. He was to be the first evangelist to both the Jews and the Gentiles (Gal 2.12, Acts 1.15, Acts 2.14, Acts 10.1ff.). It took Jesus three years and more to refine rugged Galilean. There is no single incident of Jesus 'healing' him, but a gradual historic record of one layer after another being removed from this damaged man.

Peter was also an example of a man whose weaknesses hid his real gifting. Jesus saw who he potentially could be, and released him to become that person. The clearest example of this is that from the time of Christ's ascension Peter lived with the knowledge he would someday die a violent and painful martyr's death (Jn 21.18-19). There were no doubt times when that knowledge must have been a huge burden and a curse to him, but he carried it with dignity and maturity. Remarkable wholeness!

Are We Willing for God's Truth?

God knows us. He is, after all, our Maker. But we do not easily or willingly know ourselves. However, there will be little growth in our Christian lives until we begin this journey, not introspectively, but in God-breathed self-knowledge released to us from God Himself. For only in the light of Christ do we see ourselves as we really are, and this knowledge becomes the path or agenda for our greater wholeness (Ps 139.23-24, Is 6.5).

We must acknowledge our human state, that is, to begin seeing ourselves 'in filthy rags', as God sees us. He sees what stands in His way preventing our becoming more like His Son. There is nothing good in us, except what comes from and is of God. This attitude of humility and brokenness, of renouncing our pride, (the 'know it all' attitude) is a precursor of knowing God intimately (Rom 7.18, Mt 5.8).

Only when we come to a place where we know we cannot help ourselves can we begin to be more whole. Then we can receive the knowledge of God, of not only how He sees us, but how He wants to change us. For God, our healing is all part of the wider journey of self-revelation, of discovering who we really are. But this journey begins with our willingness to let God tell us the 'whole truth' about ourselves. Jesus is Truth, and His Truth is our healing. Without receiving such Truth we are hindered in the Way of healing and in the Life that will result from it (Jn 14.6).

Satan always wishes us to reproduce in our own lives the things we personally hate most, in order to block the way for us ever becoming the person God intended us to be. For instance, prior to any healing we have tastes, opinions, views, attitudes and even gifting which, after our healing frequently turns out to be things we most dislike. It is common to hear, 'Surely I am not like that - I hated that in my mother'. The Lord sets us free from that which has been laid on us, which is not our own.

"Jesus touches nothing He does not transform" (Roy Hession). Being changed into His image is being healed from the damage of our old nature, in our spirits, our minds, our emotions - in every area of our lives. Do we have the courage to become the person God intended us to be (Prov 2.1-8, Prov 3.1-4)?

'If you listen carefully to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in His eyes, if you pay attention to His commandments and keep all His decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord who heals you.' (Ex 15.26)