



# THE HEALING ROOMS OF GREATER SYRACUSE

*"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."*

## The Effects of Spirituality on Medical Outcomes

Does it make sense to encourage prayer for healing? Can prayer play a role in improving medical outcomes? Does prayer to a supernatural God really have a positive impact on physical or emotional healing, or is it just random chance?

We've probably all heard of medical miracles, in seemingly hopeless situations, which defy medical science. However, when confronted with a miracle, we tend to question whether or not those who reported these miraculous healings were really sick to begin with. Could it have simply have been a psychosomatic illness induced by an overactive imagination? However, assuming they were legitimately sick, how can we explain the fact that some who received miraculous healings did not even believe in God? Conversely, how can we explain that others, even those who had strong beliefs in God and prayed continuously for their miracle, succumbed to a deadly illness -- seemingly well before their time? There are reasons that cannot be addressed in this document, but we can say that in spite of this paradox, scientific study has quantified the effects of prayer and the results are surprising.

Medical science has examined the effects of prayer on physical and psychological healing and has logged some astounding conclusions. The overwhelming majority of the medical literature demonstrates a positive association between the depth of religious belief or practice and mental or physical health outcomes. More than 260 research studies and 35 review articles reflect positively on the association of faith with physical and mental health outcomes." <sup>3</sup> A survey of family physicians in Missouri reported that "most family physicians believed spiritual well-being is an important factor in health." <sup>2</sup> Another systematic review concluded that "the published empirical data suggest that religious commitment plays a significantly beneficial role in (1) preventing mental and physical illness, (2) improving how people cope with mental and physical illness and (3) facilitating recovery from illness." Another review concluded that infrequent religious attendance or "poverty of personal faith" should be regarded as a risk factor for morbidity and mortality that is nearly equivalent to tobacco or alcohol abuse." <sup>4</sup> Even the US Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) reported that a survey, based on 10 years of issues of the Journal of Family Practice, found that 83% of the studies on religiosity were related to a positive effect on physical health. Another study concluded, after studying 12 years of issues of two major psychiatric journals, that for the studies that measured religiosity, 92% showed a benefit for mental health as well. <sup>1</sup>

In another report, ninety-nine percent of 296 physicians surveyed at a 1996 meeting of the American Academy of Family Physicians said religious beliefs could heal; while 75% said that others' prayers can promote healing. Today 60 of 126 medical schools in the U.S. offer courses on religion and spirituality. The author of "Healing Words", Physician Larry Dosser, schedules prayer and meditation as part of his daily practice before seeing patients. <sup>5</sup>

In this era of scientific enlightenment, one would think that combining prayer and science to promote healing would be like trying to get oil to mix with water, however, it appears that the beneficial effect of prayer on physical healing has been validated. As a result, the medical profession is rediscovering prayer and the role spirituality can play in patient healing and survivability.

