

## Prayer

The love and graciousness You show us throughout our lives will never change, Lord Jesus, because You are faithful and dependable, and we treasure this great promise of Your everlasting love and compassion. May we never fear the evils that sometimes afflict us, because You are with us, and the demons will flee as we take hold of Your sure and steadfast promises! We praise You forever, Lord Jesus. AMEN

## Prayer Suggestions

### Prayer ideas

Open your Bible at a place in the Gospels and read a story about Jesus. Let this inform your prayers today

### On-going prayers

- **Pray for church leaders who are suffering** : Pray for church leaders who feel insecure in their work, because of the conditions of their employment, such as issues of pay, holidays and time off.
- Give thanks to God for books and the people who write them
- Continue to pray for the people of New Zealand as they suffer the appalling results of the earthquake there. Pray for all who suffer the loss of loved ones and property

## Meditation

Life is never perfect, but it can be wonderful  
When true godliness is put into action!

When days of trouble at work are transformed  
Through good, hard and honest work;

When distress and pain is changed in an instant  
By meeting someone dearly loved;

When personal difficulties are properly resolved  
Through frank and open discussion;

When misunderstandings at church are overcome  
Through care, understanding and love;

When illnesses of the mind, spirit or body are healed  
After prayer that is loving and sensitive;

Life is not perfect, but one day, it will be,  
When the Lord returns to us in His Glory!

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## Bible passage - Luke 8:40-48

<sup>40</sup> As Jesus returned, the crowd welcomed Him, for they were all expecting Him.

<sup>41</sup> Just then, a man named Jairus, a leader of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet. He begged Him to come to his house, <sup>42</sup> for he had an only daughter, about twelve years old, who was dying. As Jesus went, the crowds pressed in on Him.

<sup>43</sup> Now there was a woman who had been suffering from haemorrhages for twelve years; she had spent all she had on doctors, but no one could cure her. <sup>44</sup> She came up behind Jesus and touched the hem of His clothes, and her haemorrhage stopped immediately. <sup>45</sup> Jesus asked,

'Who touched me?'

When they all denied it, Peter said,

'Sir, the crowd is hemming You in and crushing You.'

<sup>46</sup> But Jesus said,

‘Someone touched me; for I was aware that power had gone out of me.’

<sup>47</sup> Seeing that she could not remain unnoticed, the woman came trembling and fell at His feet. In front of all the people, she explained why she had touched Him, and how she had been healed immediately. <sup>48</sup> He said to her,

‘Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.’

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## Bible Study

### Review

Today’s passage of Scripture is the wonderful story of the healing of the woman with a haemorrhage. It is a deeply touching story, and is often preached upon because it speaks so movingly of the rewards of faith in desperate circumstances. Many people have been blessed by this story because of its power to encourage both women and also people with difficult health problems.

While stories in Luke’s Gospel are mostly self contained, this one occurs within another, the famous story of the raising of Jairus’ daughter (see tomorrow). When these two are placed together, they give the impression of constant pressure on Jesus because of human need. As the crowds press in on Jesus (8:42) and as the woman approaches Jesus, Peter says to Jesus, ‘*Sir, the crowd is hemming You in and crushing You*’ (8:45). How did Jesus deal with this pressure? Despite the circumstances, He seems at ease, handling everything before Him calmly. As we will see later, this is an important observation from which we can learn.

Jesus’ healing ministry is important, but it may be that this incident is about far more. Luke 8 contains a summary of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, describing His teaching (8:4-21), miracles (8:22-25), eviction of demons (8:26-39), healing (8:40-48) and raising from the dead (8:49-56). The reason for this will become known in the next chapter, where Jesus commissions the twelve to do all these things (9:1-6). In this way, chapter 8 reads like a manual for mission, written for the early church. We should not forget that Luke wrote for these people. So what does this passage tell us about the Church’s mission?

To begin with, it does indeed tell us a great deal about Jesus’ healing ministry. This woman approached Jesus after twelve years of illness, which left her penniless (8:43) and religiously unclean. Her bleeding was dreadful enough, but Jewish purity laws (Lev. 15:25) meant that she was an outcast from society forced to live in the confinement of her home. It is difficult for us to imagine the pain of such a stigma, so when Jesus healed her, she was indeed made whole. Her body was healed, but by drawing attention to her (8:47), Jesus made sure that she would be welcomed back into society.

There is more, especially the unique manner in which Jesus speaks of power going ‘out of me’ (8:46). How could any man know such a thing? Yet if this was a spiritual reality, what did Jesus mean? Did he feel healing power flow through Him? We cannot be certain, because after she was healed, Jesus said to the woman, ‘*your faith has made you well*’ (8:48). So was the power that went out of Jesus the power of salvation, and did this bring the woman’s healing? Jesus’ mention of the woman’s faith is typical of His ministry, for He always placed great value on the smallest faith.

Throughout the whole incident, Luke contrasts a human perspective on events with Jesus’ perspective (see 8:45,46); the whole situation seems difficult, and yet Jesus brought spiritual and physical peace. At the beginning of the story, Jesus was presented with the desperate news of a synagogue leader whose child was on the point of death, and He responded to this need by going to see her. Knowing that Jesus had performed many other miracles including raising from the dead (the son of the widow at Nair; 7:11-17), the crowd jostled around hopeful of another hugely impressive event. Expectations were running very high (see also 8:40). So when an individual with a personal need, albeit a heartbreaking one, drew Jesus’ attention away from what everyone expected, Peter was sceptical. His reply to Jesus’ question, ‘*who touched me*’ (8:45) was understandable; how was it possible to know who touched Jesus with so many people around? But Peter was ignorant of the priorities of God’s Kingdom, because for Jesus, there was no priority greater than an individual in need and reaching out in faith.

We may never know exactly what power went ‘out of’ Jesus, but His comment tells us that Jesus connected spiritually with the needs of one person close to Him who needed help, and He would not prevaricate or turn away. Jesus went on to deal with the girl who was dying, but His tending to the needs of an individual in such circumstances is a clear indication of God’s love for each individual despite the pressures of the world. This Kingdom priority must also be our guide.

## **Going Deeper**

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- The importance of the number 12
- What it meant to be unclean
- The woman's use of doctors
- The hem of Jesus clothes
- Touching Jesus, was this superstition or faith?

### Notes on the text and translation

#### **V43 'for twelve years (she had spent all she had on doctors), but no one could cure her'**

##### Other translations:

*'for twelve years, and though she had spent all she had on doctors, no one could cure her'* (NRSV)

*'for twelve years, and no one could cure her'* (NAB)

This is one of the places where the text of the New Testament is genuinely uncertain. All the main Bible codices (complete New Testament copies) retain the longer sentence found in my translation and the NRSV above. However, the more recent discovery of a fragment of Luke's Gospel in a very early parchment has changed our understanding of this passage, because it lacks the phrase '*she had spent all she had on doctors*'. Nevertheless, because of the strong evidence of the main Bible sources and the fact that this information about the doctors is also found in Mark's version of the story (see Mark 5:26), I think it best to retain the phrase. Whether or not Luke included this phrase, it is not misleading.

#### **V44 'and touched the hem of His clothes'**

##### Other translations:

*'and touched the edge of His cloak'* (NIV)

*'and touched the fringe of His clothes'* (NRSV)

It is obvious what the woman did, but I have drawn attention to this phrase because in the Greek text, there is a degree of uncertainty about whether Luke included the reference to the hem of Jesus clothes. The great majority of ancient texts retain the phrase, so I have done so here.

In addition, it is worth mentioning that the word used here refers to what the ancient Jews would have called the 'tassels', sewn onto the hem of a cloak. These had special religious meaning for the Jews, perhaps because of the special tassels sewn onto priestly gowns of those who served in the Temple (Exodus 28:34f.).

## Going Deeper

### ***The importance of the number 12***

Numbers are always important within Scripture, and the number 12 is no exception. It may be natural for us not to notice the significance of numbers mentioned in the Bible text, but this is unhelpful. Luke knew what he was doing when he chose what numbers to include in his text. Now the entire story makes little difference to most of us without the number 12, except that it tells us the woman suffered for many years. However, it meant far more to early readers of the Gospel, and Luke knew this. He was a doctor who was generally 'correct' in his reporting, and this tells us that we should look at the number seriously.

Note that in this passage, Jesus is called to heal a twelve year old girl and deal with a woman who had a twelve year old condition. This might appear coincidental if it were not for the fact that for Jews, numbers meant something. Twelve was a 'whole' number, socially that is, not mathematically! It was the age when a young person grew up, it was a complete period of time, Israel was made up of twelve tribes, and Jesus selected twelve disciples to follow Him. What then does the number of twelve mean in this story?

It is just possible that the whole of chapter 8 symbolises Jesus' ministry, in which case, His cleansing of Legion could mean the cleansing of the twelve tribes of Israel from multiple uncleanness. The time had come for 'the Daughter of Zion' (a name for the people of Israel), to be restored from her historic sickness and sin, as represented in the healing of the woman with a 12 year old haemorrhage. This would then enable God to restore her, as represented by the raising from the dead of a twelve year old girl.

Now, our minds may well not quickly accept such convoluted associations, but it is highly likely that Christians of the early church saw the passage in this or some very similar way. The number twelve meant completeness, and it was also strongly connected with the complete people of God, Old Testament or New.

### ***What it meant to be unclean***

Religious regulations were set down in the book of Leviticus defining the period of time a woman was regarded as unclean and therefore isolated after her monthly period (Leviticus 15:19-32). If we read these rules they seem primitive to us, but in their day, they were a reasonable system for dealing with the genuine problems of cleanliness and sanitation.

As with so many other rules and regulations, the problem with them lay not in what they were supposed to do but in their blanket imposition in circumstances for which they were not intended. Perhaps only the legalistic mind of a Pharisee could apply a reasonable law about one thing to another. The consequence of this was that life was made impossible and desperate for someone who was seriously ill. We need to be wary of doing anything similar today.

The fact that the woman was a social outcast helps us understand why Jesus needed to help her confess her situation in front of others (8:47). We might think it cruel to ask a woman in distress to do such a thing, but Jesus knew this was the key to her future life. The more we think about it, the more remarkable it is that Jesus asked the woman to speak up in this way. The public testimony of a woman was never accepted within Jewish society without corroboration from a man, and in this case, Jesus was the vital corroboration!

Jesus is the One who deals with all the uncleanness of the human soul, and He is the One who will deal with sin and corroborate faith before the Father. So this brief story points clearly towards the theology of salvation found later in the New Testament in the letters of Paul.

### ***The woman's use of doctors***

We know that Luke was himself a doctor. In Jesus' day, doctors did their best to treat people's illnesses with a variety of knowledge available to them, mixed in with the various cultural beliefs about the body and soul. In reality, to be a doctor in Jesus' day meant being willing to apply existing knowledge about sickness and healing with a considerable amount of what we would today call 'basic' care. The idea that a doctor might deceive patients and keep them ill in order to continue to get payment, is as much abhorrent today as it was then.

Scholars have toyed for years with the awkward question of whether verse 43 of this chapter does indeed include the reference to the woman having been cheated by doctors (see Notes above). We know that this phrase is a part of the original story because it is included in Mark's version of the event (Mark 5:21-34, though not in Matthew 9:18-26). The textual evidence for this is discussed above, but scholars have long been tempted to omit this phrase, and suggested that Luke wanted to obliterate any reference to bad practice on the part of his profession. This is a dubious argument, however, for surely a good doctor would want people to know the truth, and abhor bad or money-grabbing practice. Surely, Luke wanted people to know that Jesus was the only true doctor of the body and soul.

### ***The hem of Jesus clothes***

The woman touched the 'hem' of Jesus' clothes (8:44), and was healed. Was there any significance in her touching this hem? It is unlikely because there is no hint of this in the text, but it is not impossible. It is important to remember that the word 'hem' does not mean a hem in the sense of a general edging to a garment, as it does today. In Jesus' day, a cloak worn over inner clothing was like a large cloth draped over the body, and gathered together at the four corners in the form of tassels.

Some think that the tassels on Jesus' clothes were a sign of His status as a teacher, or that they were an indication of His status as a leader in Israel. None of this is entirely clear, except for the fact that ornaments were sewn onto the corners and edges of the clothes worn by priests of Israel, as ordered by Moses (Exodus 28:33f.). Unfortunately, we have no way of knowing what tassels were worn by Jesus or whether they were related in any way to the ornaments required for priests' tassels.

If the touching of Jesus' hem by the woman means anything, it may simply illustrate her reaching out to touch the only part of Jesus within reach. It is a small but significant point, showing her desperation, and also the importance of 'touching' for people of those days. For it was when she touched the very edge of Jesus' outer garment that she was healed.

### ***Touching Jesus, was this superstition or faith?***

Jesus commends the woman for her faith (8:48), but this is the simplest form of faith. It would be possible to think that her faith was little more than superstition, for like most people of Jesus' day, she did not know much about Jesus except for what she heard, and her main concern was to get for herself the benefits she

knew other people had obtained. But perhaps it was more than that. Was the one she had heard about indeed the Messiah, and would He have the power to heal her?

There is no doubt that throughout the Gospel, Jesus sought faith. He found it in the gentile centurion (7:1-10), and in the woman who anointed him (7:36-50), and He looked for it in the disciples (8:25), even though they were struggling with this during the storm! One of the most interesting things about the way Jesus spoke about faith is the fact that He mostly told people that their faith had made them well after they have expressed it, but they probably did not know that this is what they were doing. You would not have expected the blind man healed by Jesus (18:35-43) to think in these terms; 'I have faith in Jesus, so I will ask Him to heal me!' No, his focus was his need rather than his faith, and the picture we have is of someone so desperate that reaching out to Jesus was a natural consequence of need.

Faith is not so much possessed by anyone as expressed through a person's life, and it arises from human need. This is why the Bible demonstrates such doubt about people expressing faith who are rich or who have what they need to look after themselves. Faith at its most basic arises out of need, and specifically, someone's need of God.

## Application

I am not sure that this incident tells us much about Jesus' healing ministry that cannot be found elsewhere, but this does not mean that the story is insignificant. It is of course a remarkable incident and one that has been of profound help for many years to both women and also people with chronic illness. It is perhaps most powerful as a demonstration of God's priority for those in need, and an indication of Jesus' incredible 'crisis management'! He was able to put an extremely serious situation aside (Jairus' daughter) to deal with just one person in need, without compromising His mission. This reminds us about the importance to God's Kingdom of responding to people at the point of their need, despite the difficulties of time. It also suggests the wisdom of putting all things in God's hands.

We should not however make fixed rules about putting aside a greater need to deal with an immediate one. Life is complex and we will never face the same situations Jesus faced, but we will face the 'press of the crowds'. Many people who are in pastoral ministry face almost impossible demands on their time and attention, and this is a brute fact of life. Jesus' example here deals with each situation as it arises and does not let it derail wider objectives. We will often have to place things to one side in order to meet the pressing needs of the moment; but it is often in times of crisis that faith is shown. If we prevaricate and put off the pastoral task when it presents before us, then we allow time for faith's urgency to dissipate, and when faced with indecision and disappointment, people will often stop reaching out. In the crisis of a moment, people will either reach out or stand back. So we must thank God for those who do reach out, and pray that God's people will be ready at the very moment when they do!

As Jesus responded to the woman with the haemorrhage, and as He saw the faith that was generated in her by her desperate situation, He must have longed for His own people to show such a desire! He would have been happy to know that one soul had found the healing and saving love of God, but wanted so much to show this to all God's people.

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## Discipleship

### **Questions** *(for use in groups)*

1. What does this story tell us about how God's people should conduct their mission to the world?
2. What is the significance of faith in this story, and how does this relate to us today, especially the ministry of healing?
3. How does this passage of Scripture help you, and what does it teach you about your own ministry?

### **Personal comments by author**

*When I write about a passage of Scripture such as this, I am worried that people will misunderstand me when I say that it is not primarily about the healing. It is not that I wish to downplay the ministry of healing, for I believe this to be of great importance. But more than this, we need to search for the deeper things of faith and look earnestly at what Scripture says. This passage is emotional, but it hardly sets out a pattern for the healing ministry or describes faith in any important or new way. The hardest thing of all is to try and see the world as Jesus sees it, and to operate the priorities of the Kingdom as Jesus did here; but this is what all*

God's people are called to do. We need to be encouraged that if we follow God's priorities despite the pressures of the world, then our Father will not let us down.

### **Ideas for exploring discipleship**

- *Are you ever aware that the call of Christ requires you to think about things in a different way, perhaps to do things differently to how you would usually do them? If you are aware of this, reflect on the occasions when you are aware of this, and the challenge this represents.*
- *If you are unaware of the point made previously, then pray about this matter and seek the Lord's will concerning the things you are doing, at work, or in church, or in the home. How does Jesus make a difference?*

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, You make a great difference to our lives, though we sometimes do not recognise this. Open our eyes to the way that You guide us, and the manner in which You help us. Inspire us and encourage us so that we become confident in You, and willing to risk anything in Your service. We ask this in the name of our Saviour Jesus: AMEN

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