

One Year in Hospital



Pages From My Life's Book (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as I continue to share with you vital lessons of the Christian faith that God taught me during the three years in World War II that I served as a hospital attendant with the British Forces in the deserts of North Africa.

For almost this entire time I had no opportunity to attend a church or listen to a preacher. In a very real sense, God Himself discipled me in three main ways: through the Bible, through the Holy Spirit, and through the successive situations and circumstances in which I found myself. Looking back, I see how God systematically arranged one situation after another in order to teach me the great basic principles that I would need in my subsequent service for Him. When I think about this I am always reminded of what Moses said about God's dealings with Jacob in Deuteronomy 32:10:

> "He [that is, the Lord] found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye."

I pointed out earlier this week, but it's worth saying again, the order there is important. God found him, He led him, He instructed him, He kept him. That's the order that God deals with us. First, He finds us; then He leads us. If we're willing to be led, He instructs us. And if we're willing to be instructed, He keeps us. But being instructed depends upon being led and being kept depends upon being led and instructed. And that was the order in my life: God found me; He led me; He instructed me; and I thank God, He kept me.

Today I am going to share with you vital lessons that I learned through one year that I spent sick in the hospital as a patient.

I was part of a medical unit that was attached to one of the main British armored divisions in North Africa. Our function was to provide medical services to the troops in the armored division. We went together through the Battle of El Alamein, the great turning point in the war in North Africa. We shared in that victory and we began the move westward across the Egyptian desert into Libya. And it was as I was moving with my company that I became sick with a condition that was undoubtedly due to the desert, the food, and possibly also to my emotional reaction to these things. The skin on my feet and later on my hands became raw and sore and infected.

Now, after awhile I couldn't wear army boots and then I found it difficult to walk. The medical officer that I worked with valued my services and he did everything he could to keep me out of hospital, but eventually he had to say, "There's no alternative. I'll have to let you go into hospital."

So I was admitted into a hospital in Libya and later transferred to a hospital in Egypt and then to another hospital in Egypt. But one way and another, I spent almost exactly one year on end in British military hospitals in North Africa. Much of the time I was a bed patient. My condition would clear up temporarily, but the moment I began to use my feet or expose myself to the sun or to the sand, the condition reopened.

It was a comparatively common condition with British soldiers in those conditions. I remember being in one ward with another British soldier who had been two years in the Middle East and spent eighteen months in hospital with that condition. And apparently in the condition and with the facilities available to them at the time, the doctors really did not have a satisfactory medical answer. They gave my condition various long names, each doctor picked a new name. Eventually it was characterized chronic eczema, but whether it was chronic or not or whatever the name was given, the medical profession in the situation didn't have apparently a complete cure.

As I lay there one year in the hospital, there were many, many battles going on in my mind. I had two main enemies that assailed my mind, both of them begin with "d." One was doubt, and the other was depression. I'm sure that none of you have ever had problems with doubt or depression or maybe you have, but I was a believer. I knew the Lord. I was committed to Him. And yet I lay there having these raging battles in my mind against doubt and depression. "Had Got forgotten about me? Did He really care for me? Could He heal me? What was going to happen to me?" And one of the things I said over and over again was, "I know that if I had faith, God would heal me." The next thing I said was, "But I know I don't have faith." And every time I said, "I don't have faith," I was right there in that dark, lonely valley of despair. And then God sent help to me through His Word through one particular verse of Scripture: Romans 10:17. "So then faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (I'm quoting the King James version, which was what I was reading.)

And I laid hold of two words, "faith cometh." They were like a ray of light in the darkness of that lonely valley. "Faith comes." If you don't have it, you can get it.

How does it come? I studied that verse over and over. "Faith comes by hearing." Hearing what? God's Word. So, if I wanted faith, if I needed faith, if faith was the answer, I could get it if I would hear God's Word.

I knew God's Word was there in my hand, the Bible that I held before me, the Bible that I was looking at at that very moment. How could I get faith? By hearing what God was saying to me by His Holy Spirit through His Word. And I determined that's what I would do.

So I determined I was going to get faith! I determined I was going to hear what God was saying to me, that I was going to try to shut out other voices, that I was not going to listen to doubt or depression when they attached my mind, but I was going to focus my entire attention on what God was saying to me in His Word.

I thought of a practical way to do this. I armed myself with a blue pencil and I decided I'd read through the entire Bible and I would underline in blue certain particular themes and I chose four related themes: healing, health, physical strength, and long life. And so, in order to make myself focus on what God was saying to me about those four aspects of that total theme, I read through the Bible from beginning to end, underlining in blue everything that related to healing, health, physical strength and long life.

I think it took me about four months to get through the Bible that way and afterwards, when I had finished the Bible and looked back through it, do you know what I had? I had a blue Bible! There was hardly a page anywhere in the Bible where I had not had to use my blue pencil.

Interestingly enough, there were probably two books that contained the most blue pencil. I wonder if you can guess what they were? One was in the Old Testament and the other in the New. The Old Testament book was the book of Proverbs. The New testament book was the gospel of Matthew. But the whole Bible was just filled with passages underlined in blue and I suddenly realized that healing is one of the major messages of the Bible, that God is a Healer! I saw time and time again, how God revealed Himself to His people. Exodus 15:26:

> "I am the Lord that healeth thee. I am the Lord your healer."

Again and again God said to His people, "If you will obey Me, if you will keep My covenant and My statutes, I will put none of these evil diseases upon you. I am the Lord that healeth thee."

I read Psalm 103:

> "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases..."

Again and again this theme of healing went through. Matthew 8:17:

> "Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses... and with His stripes we are healed." [That's the addition from 1 Peter 2:24.]

I saw that Jesus spent many, many hours of His ministry ministering to the sick, probably more time ministering to the sick than He spent actually preaching. And as I did this, my whole mental image of God underwent a radical change. I think I'd grown up with a kind of boyish image of God as a, let me say it reverently, a rather irritable old man with a long beard, somewhere a long way off in an office. If you were in trouble, you had to go to His office. I think I pictured Him like a kind of grumpy, unreasonable schoolmaster.

But now, through reading the Bible this way and hearing what God was saying to me through the Bible and focusing my attention on it, my picture of God changed. I saw God as a loving Father. I saw Him as one who planned the best. I saw that if I could commit my life to Him without reservation, He would arrange everything for the best, that He loved me, that He cared for me, that He'd made provision for me, that He wanted the best for me. A whole kind of religious background fell away from me. I'd always had the impression that if you were going to be a Christian, you'd better prepare to be miserable. I think it went back to those words in the Anglican church service that I heard so many times, "Pardon us miserable offenders." And really, somehow it made such a deep impact on me that Christians were miserable people and that God was a harsh, stern, unreasonable God. Then that image changed and I saw God as loving, and wise, and gracious, and kind, and able to provide for His people and keep them in every situation and circumstance.

Well, our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll finish the story of my year in hospital. I'll share with you how faith, in turn, led to healing.

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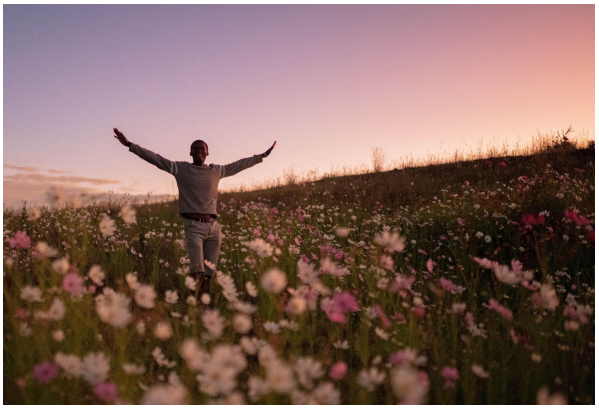

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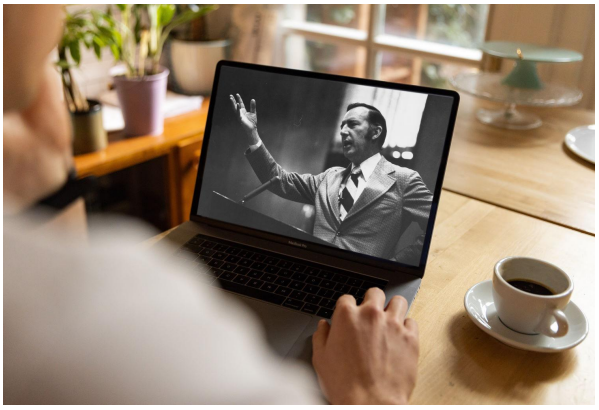

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