

How to Bring Heaven in Healthcare

Episode 7: Helping Heaven Land in Healthcare Full Transcript

[Length of episode: 35:01 minutes]

Pete Carter

In this session, I'm joined by my friend, Dave Foggon, one of the senior leaders of Eastgate Church and also a member of the Heaven in Healthcare team as we look at how churches and health workers can better work together in order to release the resources of heaven to enhance healthcare provision.

Dave Foggon

I remember years back now when we first knew each other and I was very eager about sharing testimonies all the time, posting them online all the time and very excited to share good news about the things that I saw God doing and I don't remember the details, but there was one story I was particularly excited about, because it was something that happened on the street. And I'd actually met that person again, so there had been medical follow-up, so then I had a medical result on the healing. And I posted it online, not really thinking anything of it. And you actually kind of very gently issued me a correction because there was something in the wording that I'd put in relation to the doctors, which was something kind of insinuating or presumptuous about what they were concluding or thinking about it. And I remember thinking, 'Wow'. I had no idea that I was actually approaching things through a particular paradigm that I had at that time. And ever since then, it's stuck with me. It stuck with me. Ever since then, I've been conscious every time I do share a testimony of not overreaching in that respect, but also particularly making sure that I am honouring the medical professionals involved and celebrating what they're doing. I'm not fighting against them. We're all working together towards the same outcome. But really, that is just one small example, I guess and scratching the surface of what is a big issue there, isn't there?

Pete Carter

Yeah, I think it is a very big issue and I think I remember doing it although I don't remember the specific details, but I remember reading it and thinking 'oooh, ouch'! And that's from a Doctor's point of view. You know, it's that sense of there are certain things that are said. Maybe with good meaning, but carelessly and uninformed that say something - about the medical profession or maybe specific people within that - that intimates a sort of level of lack of care, diligence or whatever, you know, just a sense of..and I thought, we need to celebrate medicine and miracles. I think this is a massive challenge because I honestly believe that the Christian world is unwittingly quite hostile to the medical world. And I'll try and illustrate that as we have this conversation. I say unwittingly, because I don't think Christians, broadly speaking, are going out to dishonour the medical world, but I think that there's a lot of stuff that goes on in Christian language and Christian practice that subtly or maybe

not subtly actually runs down the medical world or medicine. So, you know, an example is the anti-vaccination stuff that comes out from some Christian circles in thinking – and some of it's informed, particularly by some stuff that's come out in the past from people who were making great strides forward in the realms of healing. And I won't name anybody, because I don't want to run anybody down, but there was some language that came out that basically talked about it as if medicine was of the devil, you know, and if you sought the doctor, basically, it was reprimandable as a Christian – that you should never need to do that as a Christian because if you had enough faith you'd be well.

And it's just this there's a theology that was being formed around it I think still informs the part of the Christian world that is going for healing in particular, that actually has within it some understanding that healing is really the 'special' thing and avoid medicine because it's 'ungodly' or unnecessary – we shouldn't need it. Now, I understand that as an aspiration. I'd love everybody to be so well that they don't need to come to us to get better. But actually, medicine does more than just get people better – there's the whole evidence around healthy lifestyle. So, to be honest, I've experienced this time and time again in my life. The 'ouch' moment.

I remember being in a Christian meeting once and this testimony was going on about a healing – and I want you to know that I rejoice in every healing because it's an act of God and I choose to rejoice in it – but some of the language that goes alongside it, I don't rejoice over, to be honest. I just think it's it's unhelpful, painful even. So when – in this testimony – the person said, "I went to the doctor, but they cursed me with their diagnosis" I thought 'hold on a minute...excuse me!' The doctor probably did a very good job, and the diagnosis is simply information. But to say that they cursed you. That's strong language. Yeah, that doctor could have been a Christian... or even if they're not, it's terrible language! And I said, I doubt if you got a bank statement through that showed you were in debt, you'd say, "Oh, the bank manager's, just cursed me", you know? No, it's just information. So the doctors are trying their best, and there is a lot of careless language around sometimes. Well, this is quite common to hear: 'we went to the doctors, but they didn't do anything'. So you're thinking, well, I'm sure they did. It's like they sat there, you know, without any reference to what's up. Now, there are limitations to medicine. Medicine is not perfect and in actual fact, things develop over the course of time, and there are all sorts of nuances to how the medical world works. But what I found is that there's....you got this realm where Christianity is trying to pursue the supernatural more and particularly healing – it is not uncommon for the medical world to be run down in that branch of Christianity.

So there are certain things that are just in the language and also not just run down, but there are practices there that make the medical world want to run away. So – I think we mentioned it in one of the earlier episodes – but the idea that untrained people can actually measure somebody's leg length by simply sitting them down and getting their feet out in front of them and doing this, that and the other, is plainly nonsense. Now there are ways of measuring somebody's legs, and it's clinically done (and I could teach you how to do it).

But for most people who are doing this, it is a technique that they will have learned. Now what I want to say is I understand that God heals people and many people have been healed in those contexts. But then we sometimes justify the technique as if the technique works. And when people say this to me – and I have been challenging this leg lengthening thing/measuring thing and the idea that legs have definitely grown out – I’m not saying it can never happen, but the idea that this is what you just saw, is very, very questionable. And any medical people within that context hearing that – they’ll go, Hmm. This is bogus. It gives people reason to be skeptical. And, as I talk to other, particularly Christian doctors, it’s almost one of those things where we have to sort of distance yourself from from that as the reality.

Now, as I say, mostly it’s done for people who got a bad back. So this is the technique.. And so when I raise it with people, I say, ‘why do you do that’ So, ‘well, it works!’ Well, as soon as somebody say ‘it works’, I know there’s a problem, because if it works, then we’re attributing the healing to something other than God. So once we attribute it to a technique, then somehow we’re in control of that. And collectively, you know where is God in that statement? Yeah. So it bothers me on that level. It it becomes something that becomes almost like a formula that Christians do and then they become known for it. And the medical world looking on thinking, ‘this is this is not good’. It’s almost like practicing medicine without a license. Yeah, because you you can’t. You’re making a diagnostic statement without the skill to diagnose. In terms of us in Heaven in Healthcare, trying to enter into the health world and gain their trust and confidence, it really causes great stumbling blocks. So it is a big problem.

Dave Foggon

Yeah, I’d say I’ve observed people almost ‘resorting’ to it as, like you say, like a formula, you know. So they they try praying for the back to be healed. Oh, that didn’t work, so well we’ll do this. This will work. It’s almost like it’s the trump card that you can play if a back doesn’t get healed. It’s kind of just really another one of those formulas that people like to rely on instead of actually just relying on faith in the person of Jesus.

Pete Carter

The other thing I think the Christians do and and most people I think, are well-meaning, but there’s a lot of training that goes on that teaches these techniques. Whereas if somebody’s got a bad back, I say, just pray for the back. God does not need our pseudo diagnostic information to help him heal somebody. It’s as if we can give Him a bit more information, which we don’t really understand. But I was talking to some friends who have been trained in a certain healing ministry, and I said, ‘How do they teach you to pray for somebody with diabetes?’ They said ‘Oh, that’s very straightforward. Those people need a creative miracle of their pancreas. So we pray for a creative miracle of their pancreas’. I said. “That’s very interesting. OK, so how many different types of diabetes are there?” “Ooh, I’m sure a lot”. No, actually, there are two types of diabetes – there is type one and there is type two. Now Type One is due to pancreatic failure, and that person does need the pancreas to be sorted out by God. But so type two has got nothing to do with pancreatic

failure, it's actually to do with insulin resistance. So when you say you need to pray for a creative miracle of a person's pancreas and their diabetes, the majority of people who have diabetes, (which is type two) that just simply isn't true. And again, the medical world will go, Oh, OK, these people are trying to be pseudo-medical in their language. Then they lead people to believe. So this is a person who is vulnerable, people when they come for prayer are susceptible to ideas, so you can you can introduce into their mind unhelpful ideas, which when it comes down to talking to the doctor, actually cut right across that...

Dave Foggon

...undermining it. Yeah.

Pete Carter

Yeah, it's a battleground. So there's that side of things. And I think what we've got, there's the other end of the spectrum of Christianity, which is where – and I understand how people end up here – is that basically these Christians have very little room for healing in their theological beliefs, certainly their practice, and they have got all sorts of reasons why they don't want to pursue it. And some of them are over here because they see for people who seem to be leading the way on this. You know, it doesn't fit together. So people who are thinking this through will retreat out of that situation over here and then somehow we've got to find the place – which is really again at the heart of Heaven in Healthcare – where great medicine can sit alongside the great works of God in a collaborative way without bad language going either way, if you like...without bad thoughts, but actually how you put these two together? I think it's really important that we we celebrate great medicine and we push in to celebrate great, great miracles. But there's there's a broader issue of how Christianity as a whole – not just Christians in healthcare, but Christianity as a whole – the language they talk in that arena is really important. And as I say, probably one of the most obvious ones is vaccination. That is a hot topic now. It's not just a hot topic from a Christian point of view, it's become a hot topic from others. You know, there was a problem with a doctor in the UK who raised the issue of the MMR vaccine and was it linked to autism? And his research was completely non-credible. Ultimately, dismissed, and he lost his medical license. But the fear that he introduced into the system of MMR vaccines was so much so that actually it's reduced the uptake of MMR – and then people are at risk of these diseases. So, yeah, I just think...I can talk about this in all sorts of ways.

Another one is which I think is interesting is some of the guilt and shame that sometimes gets attached to Christians with various illnesses and particularly mental illness. So the statistics, as I understand them (and I've discussed this with a couple of psychiatrist friends of mine, they say this is this is true in their understanding) say that in the UK, Christians with depression recover less well than non-Christians. You think whoah, hold on a minute, what's going on there? And that's probably because they feel ashamed and guilty to have any symptoms of depression, therefore, they're less likely to seek help. The idea of taking antidepressant medication is something that can be [considered]

again 'shameful' within within the Christian context, and we've got to start dealing with that - mental illness, is another aspect of dealing with people's wellbeing. So we have to take away any sense of shame, guilt around that and something we've talked about quite a lot here, at Eastgate is that, you know, there is no shame in admitting to mental distress, and if you need help, get it. It's why we actually have a professional counselling service here, and we've talked about if you need to take antidepressant medication because that's been prescribed by the doctor, there is no shame attached to that. Hopefully you won't need it forever, because you will improve and no longer need it. But if you do need it, please don't feel ashamed of taking it. I think that message is going to go out across the Christian world for more.

Dave Foggon

Yeah. Yeah, because actually so many people are actually just feeling like they're an inferior Christian and they're condemned right now.

Pete Carter

Yeah. Whereas if you've got a broken leg, you don't necessarily feel inferior. But look, you know, mental wellbeing is a more complex issue than just a broken leg. So we need to, you know, approach it in certain ways. And that's why we've got a lot of ways of helping people here at Eastgate. Broadly speaking, the Bible talks about, we get, transformed by the renewing of our mind. So that's a discipleship issue as well. So helping people think well and get to mental wellbeing is an important aspect of what we're doing as well.

Dave Foggon

Yeah, yeah. I think it's kind of ironic, isn't it, that we, as the church often has this perspective on what is God's work in the area of health, and what isn't. And the irony of that is that one of The New Testament's most prolific documenters of miracles was a doctor! Yes. So we tend to miss that fact don't we?

Pete Carter

Yeah, there's Luke right there. I think it's such a vast topic, and I think we've talked about the idea that Heaven in Healthcare is hoping to be an honest broker in that place. But I think it'd be crazy to think that we can change the whole Christian world's thinking about this - but I think we can be informing of it, and helping train churches and church leaders to be environments which are extremely friendly to the medical world; where Medicine is celebrated. One of the things we often do at our Heaven in Healthcare conferences is we actually provide a guard of honour type of thing for anybody who comes to a conference. And then as they walk through, we simply applaud them - and the emotional release that those people feel, and for many there are tears streaming down their faces as we celebrate them - for who they are and what they do - and then people come to me and say that that's the first time I've felt celebrated in church for what I do in my life. And yeah, it's a sad thing. So just celebrating - and we teach people at church when you go, go to the doctor, say, thank you. Yeah, just say thank you. So I think trying to educate the whole Christian world to be more grateful and recognising medicine as a gift from God. Because once you recognise it as a gift from God, then it changes it. If

you think it's actually from the devil, then you got a real problem.

Dave Foggon

Yeah. And the thing is by taking that posture, what are you saying to your congregation? Because actually, you know, a lot of people in the health world are Christians and so there's a good chance that if you are kind of projecting that kind of narrative as a church leader, then there's a good portion of your church that you're effectively saying that what you do day-to-day is the devil's work. And we're not saying that to anybody else, but it's just you guys, and you're actually trying to make us all better. So it's kind of bizarre when you think about it like that, and we are slowly coming around to the idea of what we call 'workplace missionaries' so to speak. You know, we used to have this idea of missionaries as only someone that goes off to a different part of the world. And we're starting to change that or we see people in the world of business and arts and media and see that they are a missionary to that world, but we haven't accepted that in this area. And actually, God has placed millions of missionaries in the world of health who right now are not celebrated and actually feel completely disempowered to do what God's called them there to do. They're the ones that can influence health the best.

Pete Carter

And then they will retreat away and sometimes potentially into a powerless Christianity. The expectation of them is released from them so that they can exist there and not be challenged by anything. Yeah, I have so much to say about it...

I've got one story which I really enjoy about a church I work with up in Scotland and a friend of mine. I did a Heaven in Healthcare Conference there, and a friend of mine who leads a church there, not in a medical field, said he wanted to come along. He said to me after this - because I was teaching about all this stuff - and this was to the health professionals there who were going, nod nod nod, yes this is our experience! And he came to me afterwards and he said 'Pete, I never realised that our church was hostile to the medical world. Thank you for letting me see this, and we're going to change'. Oh, that's beautiful. And I was back there actually just within the last few months and I was preaching on a Sunday and I took note because they do a lot of news and testimonies of people's well-being and stuff like that, and I just thoroughly rejoiced when there was a testimony at the front of somebody who went to the doctors, got great healthcare and now they're better. And I thought thank you..that's beautiful, you know, 'I went to the doctor and I got better'. Yeah, yeah. Amen. Yes. I mean, the Bible says very clearly that a house divided against itself, can't stand. You know what, if God wants people to be well and medicine does it? No, it's not an absolute argument for it, but it's just well personally, I feel God has breathed upon my medical career and He's been there with me in it. So I can't see anything other than it's actually aligned with the purposes of heaven.

Dave Foggon

So you said that a lot of people in that conference - the medical people - were

nodding along. I imagine that anybody in healthcare listening to this right now will be nodding along as well. So I guess one thing that we would encourage is that if there's a church leader that they are connected to, we'd encourage them to watch this together. But what would be a good next step for them? Do you think, first of all, maybe just for a church leader to start listening to the hearts of the health professionals and the healthcare workers in their congregation?

Pete Carter

Yes, just have a very open conversation, so invite people in and say, 'What does it feel like to be in this church and the health world - how does it feel?' That would be a great question to ask. We do offer training around some of the stuff that can help other church leaders - and I was recently talking about this in a conference within the UK, on a broader scale and I had two church leaders at this conference come to me and they said, 'Look, we didn't realise this. Could you train us so that our church will be a hospitable environment for our health workers?' Because we have a lot of them in our congregations. And I think that's true. There are a lot of people in our church congregations that don't feel celebrated at all. On the contrary. Then for the church leaders, that's a responsibility.

I think one of the things worth saying is that one thing we do is make sure with our healing testimonies, we just report the facts that are placed in front of us and not to extrapolate things. So, if somebody reports that their pain is gone, but we don't know that they are healed, we're really careful about that here. So we believe that it's up to the patient or somebody who comes to prayer - it is their story to tell. Not to extract that from them. So - how you get testimonies out of people, because you can lead people into a testimony and then they go away thinking.....I think it's easy to manipulate people into agreeing with us on certain things, which is why I'm careful about the use of the pain scale within the immediate healing context. I think that's another bit of wisdom that we have here. It's not that we can't use it, but you know, imagine you come along and you've got really bad pain in your leg and we say, well, on a scale of one to ten, how bad is it? You say, "Well, it's about a nine. It's really bad". OK, so we pray for you now, earnest prayer expecting God to do something and then we say, "Okay, what's the pain now?" Now it's very difficult for you not to give me a low number! Very difficult because you're trying to be expectant in faith and stuff like...now we can lead people into a testimony that they know is not true. Yeah, they then feel led into untruth. It doesn't help them at all. So we try and frame questions here at Eastgate where people can give us the information rather than us coaxing them through it. And also the other side of things with pain is that pain is a variable reality. I'm sure every one of us has experienced a excruciating headache [moans] and then within five minutes, it feels better. So if you use the pain scale on that one...pain has variability within it. So, it's immediate use is...I would put a question mark over how wise it to use it but I'm I think - like we said previously - with regards to the Healing Centre, we have used it as a long-term measure of before and after results. I'm not saying it's not useful at all, and it is used in places like emergency departments to assess somebody's level of pain, so I'm not saying it's not

usable, it's just I think when we put a medical tool in the hands of non-medical people, yeah, how it gets used is debatable.

Dave Foggon

Well, this is another good example of how actually healthcare knowledge and expertise can help advance the healing movement. The healing movement might not necessarily realise that, but actually there are areas where we've got blind spots, and we don't realise what we're doing, that is actually hindering the progression of the Healing movement because actually what we're doing in certain areas is releasing lack of credibility, releasing people into disappointment, then people feeling manipulated like you were suggesting. So I think it's - why not work together and help each other move forward?

Pete Carter

Yeah, so I think getting people from the medical world to sit alongside the people who are really passionate about healing so that they learn how this works together - how does this feel? What's good language to use? What's not good language....not as a restriction, but I think if you put those two together, both have to have faith that's moving in the same direction. Not 'We don't believe in healing and we're going to give you the medical perspective' That wouldn't be helpful for that context. So yeah, I think there's a heck of a lot to say around it.

Dave Foggon

I think for me, recognising the fact that I have no medical knowledge whatsoever - I've chosen to embrace that. If that makes sense? That's why one of my favourite prayers is just "Thank you, Jesus". I don't know how He's going to deal with something, and I don't really know what it is, but I know that my job is just to release His presence, and I trust that He will take care of the rest.

One example I remember from a while ago was I met this homeless man and I had a word of knowledge for an area of his body, and he revealed that he had a metal rod there. Now what's the prayer for take care of a metal rod?! What's the prayer model for that? I have no idea, but I just released his presence and I then was very careful not to tell him, "Oh, this has happened to you...God's done this for you" or whatever. He just reported to me that he was able to do things that were physically impossible with the metal rod. Did God get rid of the metal rod and put the bone back in there? Or did He just make the metal rod bend? Who knows? I don't need to know. I don't have that knowledge and that's about understanding what my role is in that situation and what's God's role. And if there was a medical person present, then they might have been able to give a different perspective on it, wouldn't they - but it's really important, I think, to understand what our role is in the healing movement and what our role is in any interaction that involves God touching someone's life and making them better.

Pete Carter

I think this will be an encouragement to people - hopefully everywhere - that we work through a lot of this stuff, and we've had to think it through ourselves.

Eastgate is not a perfect environment, but we have thought this through a lot and trained our people. And the fact that our Healing Centre – which is a place where people come for spiritual healing – it is not a medical provision; there's no medical provision going on there, but there's a lot of folks in the medical world who are volunteers within that context. But the fact that it is now being accepted by our health authority is a massive step forward. So it's possible. But actually, you have to think if you want to get anywhere near that, you've got to think this stuff through because there's so many things that could lead to the medical world trusting us. So to get to that stage of trust is for us has been a great joy. But hopefully, it's not just a great joy for us – it's a breakthrough moment for other aspects of Christianity, so that we can all move forward together.

Dave Foggon

and maybe knowing that that's possible...that gives hope to people from the healthcare world, but maybe it can also give hope to people who are non-medical but are from the healing movement. I think a lot of the behaviour that we've seen over the years and that maybe we've been guilty of, actually, maybe that's rooted in a fear; an underlying fear that we're never going to be accepted by the medical world. So it's almost like we're opposed to them and actually seeing that when we do it in a credible way, actually, that doesn't need to be the case at all. That actually that can bring hope to people, I think, and set them free from being afraid of that.

Pete Carter

I think another phrase which we have found is useful is the idea that medicine's not a second class healing. It's like – going to the doctors is not a lack of faith. If you believe that medicine is a gift from God, there's faith engaged with that, because you believe you're accessing something that God has provided on planet Earth. So I think it's not a lack of faith to go to the doctors. We have to say that. So, you know, it's not a 'lesser' version of Christianity to access medical help, and hopefully it will be less and less necessary as we live lives that are healthier. So hopefully we get to that point where actually our bodies aren't getting sick in the same way. Or, as soon as we are sick, we pray, we see God do a miracle immediately. Then obviously we can reduce the workload of the Health Service, which would be phenomenal. You know, that would be very good news! So again for us, it's really important that Heaven in Healthcare sits as 'good news' to the health service, as does our Healing Centre. So we are there to enhance that provision, not oppose what they're doing or cause great difficulties or stumbling blocks for them. So I think the idea that medicine is not 'second class' in God's sight...

I'd also say this is true: for most people, most Christians, when they get ill, they access a mixture. They get people praying for them, and they accept medical care. You know, most of us, say we get a touch of the flu – basically bad aches and pains – then most of us would take a paracetamol/ibuprofen, rest a bit, make sure we've got fluids going in. So it's all good medical advice. We don't need to go to the doctor to access it, but we think that's normal, sensible (unless you really are opposed to taking any sort of medicine), and that's just

that's just good healthcare - and it's acknowledging that.

Another one that came to mind as I was thinking about this session was one of the greatest health prevention things - if not the greatest one in the world - has been the provision of clean water. It has saved more lives than anything. Now, I can't imagine Christians saying to somebody who lives in an area of the world where their water is 'questionable', (you know, possibly contaminated, but you could get rid of that problem by boiling it) "Oh, you don't have to boil water ... you know, that's a lack of faith". That would be so irresponsible, you would want to shut that Christian up! But that's health advice. You know, and I can tell some stories about that particularly in the Third World where I've seen some extraordinary breakthroughs just in that realm of saving kids lives through people understanding the need to boil water. So how many millions of children's lives has that saved across the globe over the decades, centuries? So if you think about it like that, if anybody was saying, "Well, you don't need to do that, you just drink that water in faith" You go, "You're crazy....shut up!" But that's the same thing. What I'm talking about. It is an equivalent - that is health advice. Widely acknowledged to be acceptable. It's the same thing with vaccinations right across the board, I would say it's similar..

Dave Foggon

Medical knowledge that's a God-given gift to those people, which then enables the prevention for millions of people.