The Bible describes two important actions that can help focus faith to receive healing at a specific time: anointing with oil and laying on of hands. In this message we will discuss the significance of the latter.

Jesus promised,

“And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name . . . they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover” (Mark 16:17-18).

Clearly, the laying on of hands is important for us to understand, especially if we want to see the promise of healing fulfilled in the church today.

Hebrews 6:1-2 identifies this practice as one of the foundational doctrines of the church:

Hebrews 6:1-2Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

Here “laying on of hands” refers to more than the simple act; it stands for a key doctrine. Apparently it represents the miraculous work of the Holy Ghost in the church, including the gifts of the Spirit, for in the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit commonly came with the laying on of hands.

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
To understand this subject fully, we should start with its significance in the Old Testament. Patriarchs and prophets employed the laying on of hands in association with prayers of blessing, consecration, or ordination.

- When Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, he laid his hands on their heads (Genesis 48:14).
- When Moses ordained Joshua to be his successor, he laid his hands on him (Numbers 27:18-20; Deuteronomy 34:9).
- On the Day of Atonement, the high priest used two goats to take away the sins of the nation. He sacrificed the first goat. Then he laid his hands on the second goat, confessed the sins of the people, and let this goat escape into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21).
This “scapegoat” symbolically carried away their sins, never to be seen again. Similarly, when an individual brought an animal sacrifice for his personal sin, he laid his hand on the animal’s head (Leviticus 1:4; 4:4).

The common thread throughout these examples is the symbolism of spiritual transfer. Jacob transferred blessings to his grandchildren,

- Moses transferred authority and anointing to his successor,
- The high priest transferred sins from the people to the scapegoat, and
- The individual penitent transferred his sins to the sacrificial animal.

These qualities did not flow magically or physically by means of the hands, but the laying on of hands represented what God would do spiritually and helped people to believe and accept the invisible act of God.

**IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In the New Testament the laying on of hands fulfilled the same purposes of symbolizing a spiritual transfer and inspiring faith. Jesus, the apostles, and early believers laid hands on people for blessing, healing, receiving the Holy Spirit, and consecration or ordination to service.

Laying on of hands did not occur in all such cases, however; thus it is not mandatory. (See, for example, Matthew 8:5-13; Acts 2:1-4; 10:44; 14:9-10.). The key to receiving these benefits is faith, not a physical act as such, but the laying on of hands is a divinely appointed act that helps the recipient to focus faith to receive. Here are some New Testament examples:

**Blessing**

- “But Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them and departed from there” (Matthew 19:14-15).

**Healing**

- “Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them” (Mark 6:5).

Jesus did not perform many miracles in Nazareth because of the people’s unbelief, but when He found a few who believed He laid hands on them and healed them. Clearly, the laying on of hands is not effective apart from faith, but its value is in encouraging people to believe.

- “When the sun was setting, all those who had anyone sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them” (Luke 4:40).

- “And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery. Paul went in to him and prayed, and he laid his hands on him and healed him” (Acts 28:8).
Receiving the Holy Spirit
- “Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit” (Acts 8:17).
- “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6).

Consecration or Ordination to Service
- “Whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid hands on them” (Acts 6:6).

The apostles consecrated the seven men chosen to assist them in the distribution of food to needy saints; these men were apparently the first deacons.

- “Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3).

The elders at Antioch commissioned Paul and Barnabas as missionaries to the Gentiles. God called them, but the church recognized their calling and approved of their going at this time.

- “Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (I Timothy 4:14).
- “Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (II Timothy 1:6).

Paul reminded Timothy of the gift he had received by the laying on of hands of the elders (“presbytery” in KJV), including himself. These two passages apparently refer to Timothy’s ordination to ministry, at which time he received a prophecy as well. The gift here is probably a special anointing for ministry that he received from God at his ordination.

Based on these two references, some have supposed that in their discretion they could grant spiritual gifts to others through the laying on of hands or prophecy. But as we have already seen, I Corinthians 12 clearly states that God is the one who gives the gifts. God often works through the prayers of others, but He bestows spiritual gifts at His initiative and of His choosing, not theirs. A minister whom God has called and whose calling and qualifications the church has examined, should expect a special anointing and blessing when the elders ordain him by the laying on of hands.

- “Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people’s sins; keep yourself pure” (I Timothy 5:22).

Timothy had the responsibility of organizing churches and appointing elders in them. Paul admonished him not to ordain people to the ministry too quickly, for if they were not qualified the one who ordained them would bear some responsibility for their failures.
PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE
From these New Testament examples, we can identify several important purposes of the laying on of hands.

First, the laying on of hands symbolizes the transfer of blessings from God to us.
This practice is particularly helpful in praying for
(1) blessing,
(2) healing,
(3) reception of the Holy Spirit, and
(4) ordination to and anointing for service.

Second, the practice signifies the joint work of God’s Spirit and God’s church to bring these blessings to individuals.
While God is sovereign and can perform these works without human hands, He wants to move through His church. While the blessings come from God, the church proclaims them and inspires people to have faith to receive them.

Third, it represents submission to God and His church.
In everyday life, touching another person’s head expresses intimacy or authority. A typical example is when an adult pats a child on the head. It is rare for one adult to touch another adult’s head in public. When we allow elders to lay hands on our head in prayer, we demonstrate our submission to God and to godly leaders.

Prayer by itself acknowledges our need of God, but prayer with the laying on of hands acknowledges our need for both God and the church. Moreover, since the Bible teaches the laying on of hands, our acceptance of it is an act of obedient faith.

Fourth, the practice represents consecration to God.
Humble submission over time leads to consecrated service. When those who seek the Holy Spirit receive the laying on of hands, they express not only their desire to receive the Spirit but also their new dedication to God. At an ordination service, the recipients not only seek the blessing and anointing of God upon their lives but they also signify their consecration to Him and His church.

Fifth, the laying on of hands is a powerful tool that focuses people’s faith to receive a promise from God at a particular time.
In foreign mission fields, the laying on of hands is used quite effectively in five-night revivals and camp meetings. Usually, on the first two or three nights the evangelist would emphasize repentance and surrender to God. On the last two or three nights he would build faith to receive. He would instruct the people that if they had prepared their hearts, then when they felt the hands of the ministry on their heads they should expect to receive the Holy Spirit, renewal, healing, or whatever they needed from God. After just a few minutes of prayer, people would receive their
answers. Scores would be baptized with the Holy Spirit in a few days of revival services at local churches, and hundreds would be filled at camp meetings.

In Korea, an American soldier visited one of the UPCI apostolic camp meetings. It was his first time in a Pentecostal service, and he wanted to receive what we had, repentance was explained to him. Then he was instructed, “When you have fully repented and surrendered everything to God, open your heart in faith. You will feel a sense of relief because of the confession of your sins. At that moment, begin thanking and praising God. As a sign that you have reached this point, raise your hands in worship.

When the ministry sees you praising God, they will come by and begin to lay hands on you as in the Book of Acts, and by faith you will receive the Holy Ghost.” Sure enough, when they laid hands on him and prayed, he immediately began speaking in tongues.

In order for the laying on of hands to have maximum effect in building faith, we should not practice it indiscriminately or casually. It is most effective when people understand its significance and when they are ready to receive something specific from God. When I am praying with people to receive the Holy Ghost, I do not lay hands upon them until it appears that they have repented. If they are not familiar with this biblical practice, I explain it to them, sometimes briefly while they are still praying, and I urge them to believe at the moment they feel the hands touch them.

Because laying hands on people’s heads symbolizes authority, in public settings it is usually best to reserve the exercise of this practice for people in spiritual leadership—the elders (ministry) or those they designate. In the biblical accounts, it was always spiritual leaders who laid hands on others. The recipient can more easily have confidence and faith if he knows that the person who lays hands on him is a recognized, proven leader. If a leader is not available, however, other believers can also lay hands on people who need an answer from God. (See Mark 16:17-18.) An option that helps communicate support and faith in a nonauthoritative manner is for a believer to lay a hand on a seeker’s shoulder or arm when praying with him.

The laying on of hands figured prominently in the conversion of the first new person to be baptized in Jesus’ name and filled with the Holy Spirit in a home missions church in (1992). Some saints in the church gave her a home Bible study; then she visited a Sunday service and was deeply moved. Monday she stayed home from work repenting, and that night she came to the pastors house to discuss some decisions she needed to make in order to live for God. He taught her further about repentance and the new birth, and they began to pray with her. She repented, the Spirit of God began to move on her, and after a short while she said, “I’m ready to be baptized.”

They took her to a private swimming pool, where He explained, “When you come up from the water, begin to praise the Lord for cleansing you from all your sins. I will lay hands on you, and at that moment expect to receive the Holy Spirit.” When she came up out of the water, He laid hands on her and the Spirit fell. Immediately she began to speak in tongues as the Spirit gave the utterance.
In 1995 a man with bipolar disorder (manic-depression) came to Jesus Name Apostolic church. He was often suicidal and had been in and out of mental hospitals for years. After he repented earnestly, the pastor prepared him for baptism. He instructed him that when he laid hands on him after baptism he should expect to receive the Holy Spirit with the sign of tongues. He replied, “I’m scared of that!” he told him not to worry but to believe and obey, and God would do the work. Matter-of-factly, he agreed. Because of his response and demeanor, the pastor wondered if anything would happen, but as soon as he came up from the water and he laid hands on him, he began speaking in tongues as the Spirit gave utterance. Afterward his mental health improved dramatically, he was delivered from suicidal thoughts, and he was able to get his own apartment.

When we teach the significance of laying on of hands and prepare people to receive something from God at the laying on of hands, then we will see many marvelous healings and outpourings of the Spirit. When we obey the instructions of God’s Word and focus our faith accordingly, we have the assurance that God will bestow His abundant blessings.