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When Faith Becomes Healing: Women's Lived Experiences of Divine Restoration

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explores how divine healing is understood and experienced within Apostolic faith communities, with particular attention to the relationship between religious belief, spiritual practices, and attachment to faith. The study draws on personal communications and narratives from Apostolic women who describe their experiences of illness, prayer, healing, and restoration. Consideration is given to the ways in which deeply held biblical convictions shape expectations of healing and influence interpretations of personal suffering and recovery. The study also examines distinctions between Pentecostal and Apostolic understandings of divine healing, recognizing areas of shared belief while attending to differences in religious practice and theological emphasis. Attachment theory provides an additional perspective for examining how an individual's relationship with God may influence responses to distress, uncertainty, illness, and perceived healing experiences. The findings suggest that faith can function as an important source of meaning, emotional strength, hope, and continuity during periods of physical or personal difficulty. Participants' accounts indicate that belief in biblical promises of healing is not merely doctrinal but may become part of everyday practices and personal interpretations of life events. The study contributes to broader discussions of religion and healing by highlighting how spiritual belief, religious attachment, and lived experience interact in understanding divine restoration.

KEYWORDS: Divine Healing; Apostolic Faith; Religious Attachment; Attachment Theory; Spiritual Practices; Lived Experience; Faith and Healing; Biblical Belief; Pentecostalism; Religious Coping; Spiritual Restoration; Qualitative Research.

INTRODUCTION

This study developed from a personal interest in and commitment to the Apostolic faith tradition. It draws attention to the lived experiences of women whose faith has provided a source of strength while facing personal struggles, uncertainty, and serious health challenges. Within Apostolic communities, religious teaching and an individual relationship with God can strongly influence how suffering, illness, healing, and resilience are understood. For many believers, God is experienced not only as a divine presence but also as a Father, Friend, and Savior. These understandings provide an important foundation for examining how faith and attachment to God may shape responses to difficult and life-threatening circumstances. The present study therefore focuses on real-life stories that illustrate the relationship between faith, religious practice, personal experience, and belief in divine healing. Apostolic Christianity emerged within the broader Pentecostal tradition, and the similarities and distinctions between these religious traditions provide an important context for the present discussion.

The relationship between religion, health, and healing has received considerable scholarly attention. Previous research has examined perceptions of God's love in relation to healing [1], the role of prayer of faith in experiences of healing [2], and the influence of religious beliefs among Pentecostal Christians living with HIV [3]. Collectively, these studies suggest that religious beliefs can have a meaningful influence on how individuals understand health, illness, suffering, and recovery. Despite the growing body of literature concerning faith and healing among Pentecostal and other religious communities, limited attention has been given to the persistent relationship between faith, divine healing, and religious attachment within Apostolic communities. This gap is particularly noticeable in relation to the experiences of women whose religious identity and spiritual practices are closely connected to their understanding of healing. The present study addresses this gap by exploring the influence of faith, divine healing, and attachment to God through the personal faith narratives of four Apostolic women.

Research on attachment has demonstrated that individual differences in attachment can influence people's relationships, emotional responses, and experiences throughout life [4,5]. Scholars have also examined the relationship between attachment and religious faith [6,7], proposing that the sense of security developed through early relationships with caregivers may provide a framework for understanding an individual's later relationship with God. From this perspective, characteristics such as trust, security, closeness, and dependence that develop within early attachment relationships may also be reflected in one's relationship with the divine. Applying attachment theory to the present study provides a framework for examining how a strong relationship with God may influence resilience, hope, and interpretations of healing during periods of serious illness. The study consequently brings together faith, divine healing, and religious attachment to better understand how spiritual beliefs may shape the lived experiences of individuals confronting significant health challenges [8].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in attachment theory, which explains how early relationships between infants and caregivers can influence later patterns of behavior, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships [9]. The theory proposes that the quality, consistency, and responsiveness of caregiving contribute to the development of expectations concerning whether a caregiver will be available when support or protection is needed [10,11].

Early attachment research identified three primary patterns of attachment through observational assessment: secure, anxious-ambivalent, and anxious-avoidant [12,13]. Secure attachment is characterized by distress when the caregiver leaves and comfort when the caregiver returns. Anxious-ambivalent attachment involves heightened distress during separation and difficulty becoming settled following reunion. In contrast, anxious-avoidant attachment is associated with limited observable distress during separation and little apparent interest in the caregiver upon return. These patterns demonstrate how early relational experiences may shape an individual's expectations concerning closeness, availability, trust, and emotional security.

Attachment theory further proposes that children develop internal beliefs about the availability and responsiveness of significant caregivers. These expectations can subsequently influence behavioral patterns as well as emotional and psychological responses to stressful or uncertain situations [14]. The same theoretical perspective can be extended to religious faith, particularly when individuals describe their relationship with God in personal and relational terms [15].

Within the present study, participants describe their faith as an ongoing personal relationship with God [16]. God is understood as a source of comfort, support, protection, and security. From an attachment perspective, this relationship may provide a sense of emotional stability and reassurance during periods of difficulty, illness, or uncertainty. Participants' accounts therefore provide an opportunity to examine how attachment to God may be associated with feelings of comfort, peace, confidence, and resilience. The study applies this framework to understand the ways in which religious attachment may shape personal interpretations of faith and divine healing [17-20].

Pentecostal and Apostolic Faith

Pentecostalism emerged as a Christian movement in the early twentieth century and later became a significant expression of Christianity worldwide [21]. A central feature of Pentecostal belief is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with speaking in tongues traditionally regarded as its initial physical evidence [22]. Pentecostal teaching also emphasizes the power of the Holy Spirit in physical and psychological healing [23]. Healing therefore occupies an important place in Pentecostal faith and practice [24].

Although Pentecostal communities share several fundamental beliefs, differences exist regarding spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues, and understandings of the nature of God. These theological differences contributed to divisions within the movement and influenced the development of the Apostolic tradition [25]. The Apostolic movement emerged within African American Pentecostal and Holiness contexts and placed particular emphasis on following the teachings associated with Jesus and the Apostles [26].

While Apostolic faith developed from Pentecostal roots [27], its distinctive teachings and practices provide an important context for understanding beliefs about divine healing, faith, and the relationship between God and the believer. These distinctions are particularly relevant to examining how Apostolic believers interpret healing experiences and maintain faith during periods of illness and personal adversity [28].

RESULTS

Apostolic Beliefs

The participants described Apostolic faith as a distinct religious tradition with beliefs that differ in several respects from broader Pentecostal teaching [29]. One of the clearest differences concerns baptism. Apostolic teaching emphasizes baptism in the name of Jesus [30], whereas Pentecostal teaching generally follows a Trinitarian understanding of baptism.

Another distinction concerns the nature of God. Pentecostal belief generally describes one God through the three persons of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Apostolic belief

places greater emphasis on the absolute oneness of God and understands these expressions as manifestations of the one divine being centered on Jesus Christ. This difference is reflected in the way participants described their understanding of God and their personal relationship with Him [31].

Differences are also evident in beliefs concerning salvation. Pentecostal teaching commonly associates salvation with accepting Jesus Christ as Savior, while Apostolic teaching places emphasis on repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus, and receiving the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues [32]. These beliefs provide an important foundation for understanding the participants' views of faith, religious commitment, and healing.

For the women represented in this study, Apostolic faith was closely connected with everyday life. Faith was described not simply as a set of religious teachings but as a personal relationship with God that influenced responses to hardship, illness, uncertainty, and personal suffering [33]. Their accounts indicate that trust in God formed an important part of how they understood difficult experiences and maintained hope during periods of adversity (Table 1).

Divine Healing

Divine healing was a central theme in the participants' accounts. Apostolic teaching maintains that spiritual gifts, including healing, continue to operate within the Church [34]. Healing is viewed as an important expression of God's power and as a means through which suffering may be relieved and health and wholeness restored [34].

Within this understanding, Jesus is regarded as a healer, and healing is closely connected with biblical teaching and the meaning of salvation [35]. The participants' experiences suggest that healing was not limited to physical recovery. Their understanding included spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions of restoration, reflecting the belief that faith can influence several aspects of personal well-being [36].

Prayer and Laying on of Hands

Prayer and the laying on of hands were identified as important practices associated with divine healing [37]. Church leaders and members may pray for individuals experiencing illness, with anointing and collective prayer serving as expressions of faith. This practice reflects the belief that healing can occur through God's response to prayer and the faith of the individual and the wider religious community.

Service and Obedience

Service and obedience to God were also associated with divine care and protection [38]. Participants' accounts reflected the belief that maintaining a committed relationship with God involves living according to religious teachings and remaining faithful during difficult circumstances. Obedience was therefore understood not simply as a religious obligation but as part of a trusting relationship with God.

Confession and Righteous Living

Confession, prayer, and righteous living represented another dimension of the healing process [39]. These practices encourage individuals to examine their lives, seek forgiveness, maintain relationships within the faith community, and remain committed to spiritual discipline. Healing was consequently understood in connection with both spiritual renewal and personal transformation.

Faith and Prayer

Faith was consistently connected with the expectation of healing. The participants described prayer as an active expression of trust in God's ability to respond to illness and suffering [40]. Believing while praying was understood as an important part of seeking divine intervention. This perspective places confidence, hope, and spiritual expectation at the center of the healing experience.

Divine Intervention

The participants also recognized healing as an act of direct divine intervention [41]. In this understanding, God remains present during periods of sickness and can provide strength, restoration, and relief. Healing may therefore be experienced as an unexpected or extraordinary event that reinforces an individual's faith and sense of connection with God.

The findings show that Apostolic understandings of healing involve more than the expectation of physical recovery. Prayer, faith, obedience, spiritual practices, and personal attachment to God form interconnected elements of the

Table 1: Case Characteristics and Reported Healing Experiences.

Case	Age/Stage	Health Challenge	Healing Context	Faith Practice	Reported Outcome
Case 1	Adult	Breast abnormality	Prayer and anointing	Prayer, anointing	Follow-up imaging showed no abnormality
Case 2	Adult	Abdominal mass	Prayer and surgery	Church prayer, personal prayer	Successful surgery and recovery
Case 3	Adult	Pancreatitis	Severe illness and prayer	Personal and family prayer	Reduced pain, improved functioning
Case 4	Childhood experience	Throat-related condition	Prayer before planned surgery	Family prayer and faith	Surgery no longer considered necessary

Table 2: Major Themes and Interpretations.

Major Theme	Subthemes	Interpretation
Faith and Trust	Confidence in God; belief	Faith provided reassurance during illness
Prayer and Spiritual Practice	Prayer; anointing; collective prayer	Religious practices were central to healing experiences
Divine Intervention	Unexpected recovery; protection	Health changes were interpreted through divine action
Religious Attachment	God as Father, Friend, Savior	Relationship with God provided security and comfort
Healing and Restoration	Physical, emotional, spiritual recovery	Healing was understood beyond physical improvement
Medical Care and Faith	Surgery; diagnosis; professional treatment	Medical treatment and religious belief coexisted

healing experience. For the women represented in this study, belief in divine healing provided a framework through which illness and adversity could be interpreted with hope, confidence, and continued trust in God (Table 2) [42].

DISCUSSION

Faith and the Meaning of Divine Healing

The accounts presented in this study illustrate how divine healing is understood through personal faith, prayer, and a continuing relationship with God [43]. For the participants, healing was not understood solely in terms of medical outcomes. It was also interpreted through spiritual conviction and the belief that God remains actively involved in situations involving illness, uncertainty, and physical suffering. Their narratives demonstrate how religious belief can provide a framework for interpreting unexpected changes in health and recovery [44].

One account involved an abnormal breast finding that initially required further investigation and a possible biopsy. Following prayer and a period of anointing with oil, the subsequent examination did not reveal the abnormality identified in the earlier imaging. The participant interpreted the change as an act of divine healing and connected the experience with her longstanding relationship with God. Her understanding of God as a Father reflects the attachment dimension examined in this study. Trust in God's care appeared to provide confidence during a situation that could otherwise have generated considerable fear and uncertainty [45].

Another account involved the discovery of a large abdominal mass that required extensive surgery. The mass contained cancerous cells, yet it remained intact during the surgical procedure, preventing the spread of the cancer [46]. The participant also reported having experienced none of the symptoms that might ordinarily be associated with such a condition. She attributed both the successful surgery and her recovery to God's intervention while also recognizing the knowledge and ability of the medical team. This account is important because it demonstrates that belief in divine healing does not necessarily exclude medical treatment. Instead, medical skill and divine intervention were understood as working together within the participant's interpretation of the experience [47].

A third narrative presents healing through a different experience. Severe pain associated with pancreatitis led the participant to turn immediately to prayer. During the illness, she described reaching a profound sense of peace and becoming less concerned with worldly accomplishments. Her experience was interpreted through her relationship with God and her belief that she still had a purpose to fulfill. The prayer of a family member also became an important part of the experience. Following this period of severe illness, she reported improved mobility, the absence of pain, and a continuing sense of peace. For her, healing involved physical improvement as well as a renewed understanding of purpose and spiritual identity [48].

The account involving a young child demonstrates how religious belief can be established and reinforced within the family [49]. The child had been experiencing repeated bleeding and was scheduled for surgery after medical treatment did not resolve the problem. Before the procedure, she expressed confidence that God would heal her. Her parents accepted her faith and joined her in believing that healing would occur. The symptoms subsequently disappeared, and the planned surgery was no longer considered necessary. Years later, the continued absence of the condition remained, for the family, a significant confirmation of their belief in divine healing [50].

These accounts reveal several recurring features of the Apostolic understanding of healing. Prayer appears as an immediate response to illness and uncertainty. Faith is expressed not only through private belief but also through practices such as anointing, collective prayer, and reliance on family and church members [51]. The participants also interpreted healing as evidence of God's continuing presence in their lives.

The narratives provide insight into the relationship between faith and attachment. Participants described God in relational terms and relied on this relationship during circumstances involving fear, pain, and uncertainty [52]. Their confidence that God would provide care and protection resembles the security associated with a dependable attachment relationship. Prayer functioned as a means of maintaining closeness to God, while perceived healing reinforced feelings of trust, reassurance, and spiritual connection.

The experiences also suggest that divine healing was understood broadly. Physical recovery was important, but participants associated healing with emotional peace, spiritual renewal, protection, purpose, and confidence. One participant's experience illustrates that healing could involve a transformation in the meaning attached to suffering rather than simply the disappearance of physical symptoms. Her acceptance of death alongside her belief in continued purpose demonstrates the depth of her spiritual attachment [53].

The narratives further show that Apostolic beliefs about healing can coexist with medical care. Participants sought medical examinations, surgery, medication, and professional treatment while simultaneously relying on prayer and faith [54]. Their interpretations did not necessarily position medical treatment and divine healing as opposing alternatives. Instead, medical professionals and treatment could be viewed as part of the means through which healing was accomplished [55-61].

The personal accounts therefore provide a deeper understanding of why divine healing remains significant within Apostolic faith. The belief offers participants a way of interpreting illness through trust, hope, prayer, and a personal relationship with God. Within these experiences, healing becomes more than a physical outcome; it becomes a meaningful expression of faith and a confirmation of the individual's relationship with the divine.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how divine healing is understood through Apostolic faith, religious practice, and attachment to God. The narratives demonstrate that faith was experienced as an active relationship that provided comfort, hope, security, and meaning during serious health challenges. Participants interpreted healing through prayer, biblical belief, spiritual practices, family support, medical care, and confidence in divine intervention. Their experiences also suggest that healing extended beyond physical recovery to include emotional peace, spiritual renewal, restored purpose, and strengthened trust in God. Attachment theory offered a useful framework for understanding why the relationship with God could become especially significant during periods of fear, illness, and uncertainty. The accounts further showed that medical treatment and spiritual belief were not necessarily viewed as opposing approaches. Instead, participants could recognize medical expertise while maintaining confidence in divine healing. These experiences demonstrate the importance of considering religious attachment and lived faith when examining how individuals interpret illness, recovery, and restoration within Apostolic communities.

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