

# “What’s the Difference Between Reiki and the Biblical Practice of Laying On of Hands?”

I’m researching [Reiki](#) and found a website that purports to be “Christian Reiki.” The woman who does this says she only connects with the Holy Spirit inside of her for the energy she uses. She commits each session to God and communicates with the Holy Spirit by means of prayer during the session. She further states that the Reiki symbols she uses to deliver that energy actually have no meaning but that they act as focus points for transmission of energy. I would tend to be a little leery about this but want to know, how does this differ from the Christian “laying on of hands”?

Yes; I think this does differ from the Christian “laying on of hands” (1 Tim. 5:22).

Christians lay hands on a brother or sister in Christ as an act of identification. They identify with another believer who is part of the body of Christ. When we then pray for that individual’s healing, there is no attempt to channel “energy” of some sort to bring the person healing. Rather, we simply make a request that God would heal the person if it is His will to do so. Sometimes He is willing; sometimes not. But this is a choice for God; we are simply making a request, subject to His will.

There just isn’t any biblical warrant for “Christian” Reiki, so far as I can see. We are never commanded (or even encouraged) to channel spiritual “energy” for the healing of others. Indeed, I think the biblical authors would regard such a practice as highly suspect. We are simply encouraged to pray

for their healing. And this is something we can do (and that the church has always done) without any assistance from the practice of Reiki.

In this respect I don't see what "Christian Reiki" adds to the equation (that isn't accomplished simply through prayer to God). If the Reiki practitioner thinks that Reiki gives them power or authority over the Holy Spirit, then such a belief is totally absurd and unbiblical. God is sovereign and is not in any way subject to the will and manipulation of men. So it seems to me that Reiki is a questionable practice for Christians, that adds nothing to simple prayer, and that is possibly grounded in some very unbiblical beliefs about God and healing, etc.

At any rate, that's my view of the matter.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **"Can't God Use Reiki to Heal?"**

Hi Michael,

I am a Christian and I love Jesus with all my heart and believe in His healing power provided for us at the cross. I believe the provision is there, in the spiritual realm and it is up to us to connect with it and receive healing through prayer and taking authority in Jesus' name. I believe He works through us and doesn't refuse any prayer for healing, but does

need us to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm.

Many Christians go to the doctors, take medication, have operations and none of these practices are frowned upon as "not being dependent on God for healing," but many do not glorify Jesus in their healing, they usually give the glory to the doctor or hospital who treated them.

I pray for healing and the power to receive and have had healing on many occasions and if I haven't immediately received, I do not for one minute think God hasn't healed me, I know it's my connection or the connection of whoever is praying for my healing that is not quite right.

Yesterday I went for a massage. The therapist asked me about any problem areas. I told her I had had problems with my back on and off for many years, but believed God had healed me. She began the massage, then she suddenly said, "I found the problem spot,"—which she had, she was right on it—"My hand has gone really hot, I'm doing reiki on it." She didn't ask me, she just did it. I didn't mind, didn't know much about it. The next morning I woke up and for the first time in years got out of bed without any pain or stiffness and my back has been great all day, despite lifting and carrying as is the nature of my job. I know it has been healed and I thanked God for the healing and texted the lady to tell her my back was healed. I don't for one minute think she healed me, no more than Benny Hinn heals anyone, he is just a channel like the massage lady was. I gave the glory to God and always will.

I wanted to know more about reiki; that's why I looked on the internet for information and read your article with interest. I must say I am confused and must look into this further, I only want to do the right thing and I will of course speak with my pastor and other Christians, but my main point is that it seems instead of using man-made drugs and procedures for healing, we used natural energy that I believe was created by

## **God for our use.**

I'm glad to hear that your back is feeling better! At the same time, I must honestly say that some of the views expressed in your letter strike me as biblically and theologically unsound. Allow me to explain.

I think your first paragraph is a fairly good example. I personally don't believe that what you're describing here is actually biblical Christianity. After all, where does the Bible teach that God needs us "to connect with the healing and bring it into the physical realm"? What does this even mean? I've read such things in books by Wiccans (I'm being totally serious here), but I don't believe that this is a Christian notion. After all, is God not sovereign and omnipotent? Can He not heal anyone He wants—and at any time He wants?

And if God does not refuse a request for healing, then what do you say to all the truly godly Christian people who (along with their churches and families) have urgently pleaded with God for healing—and not received it? Please think very carefully about this, because you could unintentionally end up causing a great deal of spiritual and emotional pain by insisting that such people do not have enough faith to be healed. Let me offer a bit of biblical support for this contention.

Many evangelical biblical scholars believe that Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was some kind of physical malady. But the Lord refused to heal him of it (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Now did Paul really not have enough faith to be healed? Was it not actually God's will that he NOT be healed? Similarly, in Galatians 4:13-14 he mentions preaching the gospel to the Galatians while he was ill, an illness which was a trial to them. But if Paul could have been instantly healed, then why did he put the Galatians (and himself) through such an unnecessary trial? Finally, Elisha was a very great prophet of the Lord. And yet, in 2 Kings 13:14 we read that he was suffering from the

illness from which he died (2 Kings 13:20). But such a state of affairs seems totally unnecessary (indeed, virtually impossible for a great prophet like Elisha) on the view which you have presented. It thus seems to me that we need to adopt a more nuanced, biblical view of prayer. To see what I mean, please carefully read my article on petitionary prayer here: [www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/](http://www.probe.org/problems-and-promises-of-petitionary-prayer/).

In addition, please carefully re-read the last section of my article on Reiki entitled, "Does All Healing Come from God?" at [www.probe.org/reiki/](http://www.probe.org/reiki/).

Of course, I certainly agree that modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, I'm sincerely glad that you're feeling better—and I hope that that continues to be the case. But I would caution you against getting any more deeply involved in Reiki energy medicine.

This is maybe not what you were hoping to hear, but I must give you my honest opinion before the Lord.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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# **“Is Reiki Just Another Means to Medicine?”**

I have a daughter who is 8 and [whose health] is very compromised. We have been to doctors, etc. who have yet to come up with an answer. I have had several people recommend Reiki. I have hesitated because I am very leery of “energy” based healings. I am a believing, Bible reading Christian. There is a woman in our church who suggested Reiki and is trained in it. In “testing” her [words against Scripture] I catch a lot of New Age phrases that I am not comfortable with and [it has] become clear she is not actually reading the Word of God...(vs. just attending services).

Your answer supplying [a Christian Perspective on Reiki](#) was the best in terms of guiding me that this is wrong. I think that the reason Reiki is more questionable is because it is reaching out to the “spiritual realm” that does not glorify God. Yet, I am wondering, given that conventional medicine does not glorify God (more so it glorifies the doctor) is Reiki just another means to medicine? Or is it not considered viable because it is so spiritually based?

I just do not understand energy healing and many people (including Christians) suggest we explore energy healing. Given my faith...I know that God is sovereign and can use ALL things...but He also warns us. Do you mind if I ask you to further elaborate? Given modern medicine is simply a tool of God, it does also violate some scriptural things if you look at Old Testament teachings (i.e. vaccines contain animal DNA and we are not to mix this, etc.)

I just want to put this to rest once and for all and know if I am not neglecting an avenue of potential healing for my child. Thank you.

Thanks for your letter. I'm truly sorry to hear about the health difficulties your daughter is struggling with! However, I could not, in good conscience, recommend Reiki energy medicine as a possible solution. You mentioned an email response which I wrote on a Christian perspective on Reiki, but I'm wondering if you read the article I wrote on Reiki? If not, you can find it [here](#).

In the article I go into much more depth than I can do over email. I offer an overview of Reiki energy medicine, look into the question of whether or not there is any legitimate scientific support for such energy, ask about Reiki's alleged success stories, and discuss some reasons why I believe that Christians should be concerned about Reiki.

First, and foremost, I think that we should be concerned about the spiritual aspects of Reiki. As my article spells out in much more detail, I think that we should be concerned about where the power of Reiki really comes from (provided that there is any real power there to begin with). This leads to my second main concern: if Reiki really has no power whatever to effect genuine (as opposed to merely psychosomatic) healing of the body, then we could end up endangering people's lives by sending them to a Reiki practitioner, instead of a properly credentialed medical doctor. I also explain my reasoning here in more detail in my article.

Of course, modern Western medicine is not perfect. But its reliance on quality control, reproducible results, the scientific method, extensive training, education, and licensing, etc., clearly distinguish it from much of energy medicine. In addition, since those who practice it are not typically calling upon spirit guides and other questionable entities, it is much less likely to entangle those making use of it with possible demonic involvement.

At any rate, as my article shows, it seems to me that there are sufficient reasons for Christians to be wary of Reiki and

to avoid it. Others may disagree, but this is definitely my opinion on the matter.

I hope this is helpful and, again, please check out my [article](#) on the subject (if you have not done so already).

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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## **“Is Reiki Occultic?”**

I recently pulled up your website when a friend of mine told me she has a counseling center that practices Reiki. Wondering what Reiki was, I began to search it out. Despite all the Christian voices that support it, I refuse to buy into it, and I feel it is the Holy Spirit working in me. I emailed my friend and told her of my concerns. One of her responses was, “In my mind healing is ultimately the result of God’s love, whether it is a doctor doing a heart transplant or a Reiki master transmitting love through themselves.” She feels it is “God’s action occurring in and through people.”

Is it the work of God to transport some energy through our hands to someone else? Doesn’t sound right. What it all sounds like to me is an occult type practice that people have tried to squeeze into a Christian box and it’s not quite fitting!

Thanks for your letter. I’m assuming you’ve already read my article on Reiki, but if not, here is a link to it: [www.probe.org/reiki/](http://www.probe.org/reiki/).

I begin the article by briefly considering what Reiki is. I



then look at whether or not there is scientific support for Reiki. I consider the success claims of Reiki, ask whether Christians should be concerned about it, and also whether all healing comes from God. If you haven't yet read the article, I would encourage you to do so.

Like you, I think there are reasons for Christians to be concerned about Reiki. For one thing, as it's often represented, it has a very different understanding of "God" than biblical Christianity. Thus, when it claims that healing comes from "God," it is asserting something different from what a Christian would mean when he/she claims to have been healed by God. Second, the emphasis on spirit guides should cause us concern. The Bible never tells us to seek a spirit guide, but often warns us of deceptive and demonic spirits. Third, the Bible doesn't talk about a universal life force energy which we can learn to manipulate for health and healing. This sort of language is very foreign to a biblical worldview and is only at home (really) in an Eastern worldview, or one influenced by Eastern thought.

For these reasons and others (spelled out in my article), I think it's a mistake to get involved with Reiki. My perspective would really be the same as yours. Reiki sounds like "an occult type practice that people have tried to squeeze into a Christian box and it's not quite fitting."

I would gently challenge your friend to consider the many ways in which Reiki beliefs and practices seem so foreign (and even contrary) to the teachings of the Bible. For a bible-believing Christian, Reiki seems like a difficult practice to justify.

I hope this helps a bit. Please see my article for a bit more information.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

# **“You Have to Cut the Cord to Disconnect from Reiki Energy”**

You can't disconnect from the [Reiki](#) energy unless you cut the cord linking you to the source of it.

Would you please elaborate on what you mean?

Sue Bohlin

Hi Sue, I would tell you my story but I know from experience that because of your faith you wouldn't believe in my words. I'll go as far to say is that I'm a Christian too and I became attuned to Reiki a decade ago and I never had peace with it and I prayed a lot to be released from it. I think that prayer can release someone from Reiki but if it doesn't please remember this to help someone disconnect from it, a person is corded to a spiritual being from the back of the neck at the base of the skull. You must either pray and ask this spirit being to release them or imagine yourself cutting the cord that runs out of that area and ask Jesus to seal it shut.

Thank you so much for elaborating! This is not the first time I've heard this about the spiritual connection to demons from Reiki and other forms of accessing the energy of the spirit realm.

I would suggest that it doesn't do any good to ask a demon to release anyone; but in Jesus' name we can break the connection because His power is the strongest in the universe, and as

believers we have the authority over the demonic realm (because He deputized us with His authority before leaving earth: Luke 9:1, 10:19).

Thank you so much for your insight! I am glad you walk in spiritual freedom today.

Sue

Hi Sue, I never said that Reiki was demonic; in fact I don't think they are demons, I think they are spirit beings from a different belief system, but I wouldn't go as far as to say they are demonic. The reason I wanted to be disconnected from the Reiki started because I could always feel the energy running through me and I didn't like it and I didn't want to be corded to a spirit being not of my faith.

I'm curious, \_\_\_\_\_ . . . Do you believe Jesus is the only way to God? Do you believe Christianity is true?

Hi Sue, yes I do believe that Jesus is Lord and he is my Saviour. As far as people who don't follow the Christian path and what happens to them when they die I'll leave the fate of the hundreds of thousands that died today and die daily all over this world in the hands of God for I believe He is pure love and if I didn't believe that I'd be an atheist. Take care.

Praise God! I am so glad to hear you have put your trust in the Lord Jesus! But if He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me," then His way is the only true and right way, and all other "different belief systems," as you put it, are wrong. (They might and do have nuggets of truth in them, but their basic core beliefs and values and teachings are wrong. They do not lead people to eternal life through Jesus Christ.)

I just wanted to respectfully set the record straight, sister \_\_\_\_\_, that there are no legitimate spirit beings from

different belief systems which are legitimate alternatives to Christianity. The Christian worldview—seeing reality as God has revealed it through the Bible—is the only one that’s accurate. So that means that the spirit beings are either angels or demons (some of which [deceitfully present themselves as angels](#), by the way). According to the Bible, there are no other choices. Which is why, filtering Reiki and other experiences like that through the grid of scripture, we can (and should, I believe) call these spirit beings demons.

I know this is more than you bargained for when you wrote, but Probe Ministries is all about helping people think Biblically, and I wanted to offer this perspective in hopes that, as iron sharpens iron, I can help shape the way you think to help bring it into alignment with the Bible.

The Lord bless you and keep you today!

Sue

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## “What is a Christian Perspective on Reiki?”

My friend is a Christian who practices [Reiki](#) and thinks that it’s the Holy Spirit working through her. She has a heart for healing and I don’t want to discourage her from pursuing that or deny that the Spirit is at work in her. But I fear that these counterfeits are keeping her from realizing her true potential in Christ.

I guess I have two questions: how can I lovingly discuss with her what the Bible says about these practices, when she doesn’t fully accept it as God’s Word; and can you tell me

## **more about Reiki from a Christian perspective?**

Thanks for your questions. It's terribly difficult to reason with someone from the Scriptures if they do not already accept their Divine authority. If she's open to doing some reading in the area, you may want to encourage her to look into what conservative scholarship has said about the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of Scripture. *A General Introduction to the Bible*, by Norman Geisler and William Nix is a fairly exhaustive treatment of the subject. Many books on Christian apologetics have chapters dealing with the trustworthiness of the Bible. One book you may want to recommend is *I'm Glad You Asked*, by Ken Boa and Larry Moody. It is an excellent, beginner's level text in apologetics and has a chapter entitled, "How Accurate is the Bible?," which might prove helpful. Suffice it to say, until a Christian accepts the Bible as the inspired word of God, it is difficult to use it as the final authority for proper Christian belief and practice. Such a person can always claim that the texts they don't like are simply not inspired by God, etc. Thus, this is a critical issue to deal with.

Having said that, I think you are exactly right about your friend. There are very good grounds for rejecting Reiki if one is willing to listen to the Bible. In a book entitled *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine*, a corporate project by members of the Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1988), there is a short chapter on Reiki (pp. 61-63). I will draw some information from that chapter. Although Reiki claims to be an "ancient healing practice that Buddha (and Jesus) used," all records of it were lost. It was allegedly rediscovered by Mikao Usui, a Zen Buddhist monk, in the mid-1800s "during a psychic experience." Additionally, it is claimed that details about lost aspects of the practice have "been revealed through channeling." Channeling is the New Age term for mediumship and involves contact with, and usually possession by, "spirit

guides.” The authors of this chapter state that a second-degree Reiki practitioner “learns about spirit guides and how to contact and use them in healing sessions.” They further state that third degree Reiki masters give “complete control of healing sessions to their spirit guides.” Healing sessions appear to be based on the use of “life-energy” (i.e. *ki*, *chi*, or *prana*), which is sent from the practitioner into the patient’s body.

The greatest concern would seem to be the identity of the “spirit guides.” Since they are typically contacted in ways expressly forbidden in Scripture, and since they advocate unbiblical ideas and practices, it is honestly quite difficult to view them as anything other than the biblical demons. The authors of this chapter conclude by stating: “Reiki is antithetical to biblical Christianity. Channeling is a way of communicating with spirits to obtain information not otherwise accessible. It is denounced in the Bible as sorcery, mediumship, and spiritism (Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14...).”

It seems to me that Reiki has the potential to be spiritually harmful. I would pray for your friend and encourage her to give serious consideration to the biblical warnings mentioned above.

I wish you all the best with your friend.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn  
Probe Ministries

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*A former Reiki master who has become a Christian wrote this testimony to Sue Bohlin:*

“Reiki is something that is very mis-stated, and

misunderstood, by those outside of the Reiki circle. Having been in it, I can tell you everything you need to know. I will tell you right up front that it was a hard one to shake, that it was VERY real and beneficial, but that it is decidedly non-Christian.

"I highly recommend anyone looking into it to just stop. Prayer is very powerful, and is our direct link to God through Christ. If we petition directly for healing, it may come. If we have faith that it WILL come, our chances are far better. As with anything we are to test, does Reiki point either the practitioner or the client to Christ? No. Big no. It uses a Universal energy that is non-personal and can be manipulated. You can pray to God, to the Earth Mother, to Mother/Father God, etc. But it in fact leads you AWAY from Christ.

"It is all about what you FEEL in your hands, what you FEEL in your spirit, what the client FEELS in their body/emotions/spirit. In that regard it is very very real. My hands get hot, I hit a place of extreme peace and quiet, I heal people who feel a tingle or hot spot or whatever. Their headache, menstrual cramps, emotional distress, bruises, whatever, goes away. But is God glorified? No way. Is self glorified? Yes.

"If it is so good and right, why do practitioners go on to other things once they hit Master level? The teacher who taught me was going on to acupuncture and other new Reiki teachings. Always something else, something new, something you NEED to be a true master. Sound familiar? It is like everything else in this world, but Christ. There is no lasting peace, no connection with the universe, there is a big void in your soul that is not going away. WE ALL NEED CHRIST! I told my wife when she questioned my stopping in my search for peace once I found Christ (she had followed my years of searching through New Age theologies, etc) that Jesus Christ filled the hole. All the puzzle pieces fell into place and everything suddenly made sense. For a long time after that I tried to

make Reiki fit into Christianity but it didn't. I prayed a lot about it. God firmly and solidly showed me in Scripture how it couldn't work. The two major things against it, regardless of how well it works, are 1) it does not point anyone to Christ and in fact points people away from a single true God, and 2) it is no different than all the pagan rituals in the Old Testament that would have people pray to the rain god or fertility god, etc. They must have worked or people wouldn't have kept praying to them, and God's people wouldn't have been attracted to them. But either way it isn't what GOD has asked us to do. Everything we need is in Him. We can pray for any healing we need."

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# Reiki: A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Michael Gleghorn offers an overview and critical Christian worldview evaluation of Reiki energy medicine, an alternative health therapy that has grown in popularity in recent years.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## What is Reiki?

In the past twenty-five years there has been a huge increase in both the general acceptance and public availability of various types of alternative health therapies. Although some of these therapies may be beneficial, others do little good, and some are downright harmful. Under the broad umbrella of alternative medicine there are a variety of therapies that might loosely be referred to as "energy medicine":

Energy medicine is a broad field covering a variety of



therapies from many parts of the world. While each is based on the existence of a nonphysical energy pervading the universe, the nature of the energy, the form of therapies, and how healing is believed to take place varies from culture to culture.{1}

This energy is variously referred to as *prana* in India, *chi* in China, and *ki* in Japan. One form of energy medicine that has been growing in popularity is called *Reiki*. According to some, *rei* means “universal,” and *ki* means “life force energy.” But the International Center for Reiki Training goes further, declaring that “Rei” is more accurately understood to mean “supernatural knowledge or spiritual consciousness . . . the wisdom that comes from God or the Higher Self.” Thus, according to the Center, “it is the God-consciousness called Rei that guides the life force called Ki in the practice we call Reiki.”{2}

Reiki was discovered, or perhaps rediscovered, by Dr. Mikao Usui during a mystical experience at a mountain retreat in early twentieth century Japan. Some claim it is the same method of healing used by both the Buddha and Jesus, although the records of this have been lost.{3}

So how does Reiki work? To put it generally, and somewhat simply, Reiki claims to work by removing obstructions to the free flow of life force energy throughout the body. Such obstructions, which arise through negative thoughts, actions, and feelings, are believed to be the fundamental cause of illness and disease. But “Reiki clears, straightens and heals the energy pathways, thus allowing the life force to flow in a healthy and natural way.”{4} In this way, Reiki is believed to enhance physical, mental and emotional health.

In order to tap into this power and learn to channel Reiki one must first receive four attunements from a Reiki Master during a First Degree Reiki training session. These attunements are alleged to open “subtle mental and physical energy systems”

that prepare the recipient “to channel Universal Life Force Energy.”[\[5\]](#) Supposedly, this creates a permanent connection with Reiki, thus allowing the recipient to channel this energy for life.

At this point, some may be wondering if there is any scientific evidence that corroborates the existence of this energy. Let’s look at the evidence.

## **Is there Scientific Support for Reiki?**

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some proponents of life force energy claimed it was a form of electromagnetic radiation (of which light and heat are familiar examples).[\[6\]](#) Of course, electromagnetic radiation is a real, physical phenomenon of the world in which we live. But should it be identified with life force energy? The answer is no, and today most of those who believe in such energy would say the same. After all, such energy is generally believed to be non-physical. But electromagnetic radiation is a form of physical energy.

Still, many Reiki practitioners believe that good evidence supports the existence of life force energy. For example, the aura is said to be “a field of subtle life-force energy that surrounds the body of every living being.”[\[7\]](#) Those properly attuned to this energy often claim that they can feel a person’s aura. A few even claim to see auras.

But it’s one thing to make such a claim, quite another to demonstrate it under properly supervised conditions. In one study, ten people who claimed to see auras were tested against a control group of ten people who made no such claim. “Four identical screens were placed in a room with volunteers who took turns standing behind one or another of them.”[\[8\]](#) Those who claimed to see auras believed that they could detect which screen the volunteer was standing behind. But out of 720 attempts, they only gave 185 correct answers – an accuracy

rate consistent with guessing. The control group, however, gave 196 correct answers – eleven more than those who claimed to see auras! Apparently, not everyone who claims to see auras can actually demonstrate this claim.

But haven't auras been photographed? One author claims, "Kirlian photography . . . enables us to . . . photograph auras."[\[9\]](#) However, when such photographs are investigated by independent scientists, the images are seen to have a completely physical explanation. Also, Kirlian auras have been recorded for some things not usually believed to have a field of life force energy, like pennies and paper clips. Such evidence casts doubt on the claim that auras have been photographed.

Thus, if there is such a thing as life force energy, it has so far eluded the detection of scientists. Such energy may still exist, and science may one day verify as much. But for now, scientific support is lacking. Still, some argue that "the proof of whether a therapeutic procedure is effective rests not on the gathering of data alone but on the client's actual experience."[\[10\]](#) In other words, if Reiki works, such life force energy must exist!

## **What About Reiki's Success?**

For many people, the most powerful evidence of Reiki's effectiveness as an alternative health therapy are the testimonials of those who claim to have been personally helped by it. Consider what happened to Alex. He was in chronic pain due to a motorcycle accident that resulted in three crushed vertebrae. He attended a Reiki class, and after his first initiation was free of persistent pain![\[11\]](#)

How does one explain such a story? Does it prove that Reiki really works? While it cannot be denied that there is abundant anecdotal evidence of Reiki's healing power, we must be very careful before we credit Reiki with relieving Alex's pain.

“With the exception of unsubstantiated opinion, anecdotal evidence is the least useful...evidence available to judge medical therapies.”{12}

This isn't just the opinion of conventional Western medicine. The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine acknowledges that there is a “hierarchy in the different types of evidence for therapies, with anecdotal at the bottom.”{13} Thus, anecdotal evidence counts for something, but it hardly *proves* that Reiki is an effective method of healing.

So how might we explain Alex's pain relief? Although there are various possibilities, for the sake of time we will only mention two. First, we must honestly acknowledge that maybe Reiki *was* responsible for the elimination of Alex's pain. After all, it was immediately after receiving Reiki that Alex felt relief. However, it's crucial to recognize that there is another very sensible and well-documented explanation. Quite simply, Alex's pain relief may have been due to the “placebo effect.”

“The placebo effect is the combination of factors that give therapies beneficial effects, but which are not caused by any direct physiological action.”{14} A classic example is the sugar pill. In itself it can neither cure illness nor relieve pain. However, when given to a patient by a trusted, confident physician, who says it's just what the patient needs to recover from his or her ailments, it can be incredibly effective in relieving a wide variety of psychosomatic disorders. Since such disorders have a psychological or emotional (rather than physiological) cause, they can be relieved without directly treating the patient's body.

Many studies indicate that the placebo effect can account for a full third (or more) “of the improvements found with any therapy.”{15} But can it explain Alex's sudden relief from pain? Indeed it can. Pain can be treated very effectively with placebos.

Of course, some may argue that the really important thing is not so much *why* Alex was healed, but simply *that* he was healed! To some degree, I can sympathize with this argument. But it does have problems.

## Should Christians Be Concerned About Reiki?

Most people, myself included, consider physical health to be good and valuable. All things being equal, it's better to be healthy than sick. But if this is so, then does it really matter *how*, or *why*, the sick are healed? Isn't the only important thing simply *that* they're healed? And how can anyone object to Reiki if it helps accomplish this?

These are important questions and they deserve a sympathetic response. But first, let's consider an important question: Is physical health *always* preferable to sickness? After all, most people consider such qualities as compassion, patience, courage, and love to be great and noble virtues. But what if there were people who could only acquire such virtues through the pain and suffering brought on by physical illness? So long as they're healthy, they will lack these virtues. But if they're sick, they will acquire them. Let me suggest that if you truly value these virtues, you might decide that it's better to be morally and spiritually healthy (though physically sick), than physically healthy alone.

Let's now return to our initial question. Does it really matter *if*, *how*, and *why* Reiki works? I think it does. Suppose there is no genuine power in Reiki. Suppose it "works" merely as a placebo. In that case, would you want to send a loved one to a Reiki practitioner to be treated for strep throat? Without proper treatment this would likely result in rheumatic fever, permanent heart disease, and maybe even death. Real antibiotics are needed; a placebo cannot cure this kind of infection.[\[16\]](#) Under circumstances such as these, I suspect

that no one would want their loved ones treated by Reiki alone.

But now suppose that there *is* genuine power in Reiki. Is it not important to know *where* this power comes from and *what* it is? What if Reiki offers physical health only at the expense of spiritual health? Should Christians be concerned about this?

The International Center for Reiki Training describes Reiki as “spiritually guided life force energy.”<sup>{17}</sup> After receiving the necessary attunements, a Reiki practitioner can channel this energy for life. The Center describes the attunement process as “a powerful spiritual experience” that “is guided by the Rei or God-consciousness.” What’s more, this experience “is also attended by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process.”<sup>{18}</sup>

What are Christians to make of this? Should we be concerned about the nature of this attunement process? Exactly who, or what, are these Reiki spirit guides? Should we be cautious about becoming involved with these spirits? Or should we simply trust that they’re doing God’s work? After all, doesn’t *all* healing come from God?

## **Does All Healing Come From God?**

Does all healing come from God? The International Center for Reiki Training declares that “Reiki comes from God.”<sup>{19}</sup> But if we read the material on their Web site, we see that the Center advocates an Eastern or New Age view of “God.” This view is radically different from that of the Bible. For example, the Center equates “God” with man’s Higher Self, thus blurring the distinction between God and humanity that is taught in the Bible. Practically speaking, this difference between the God of the Bible and the “God” of Eastern or New Age philosophy means that adherents of these two systems are

asserting something very different when they claim to have been healed by God.

The God of the Bible is a personal being, capable of miraculously healing people according to His will (Exodus 15:26). Nevertheless, the Bible does not teach that *all* signs and wonders come from God. On the contrary, Jesus warned His disciples that in the last days there would be false Christs and false prophets who would show great signs and wonders (Matt. 24:24). In his second letter to the Thessalonians, the Apostle Paul linked such events to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9).

But does Satan have the power to perform marvelous healings? Indeed, it appears that he might. In Revelation 13 we learn that after receiving power from Satan, the beast is healed of a near-fatal head wound (vv. 2-3). The context seems to imply that this amazing healing is the work of Satan. From a biblical perspective, this raises an important question about the healing power of Reiki. Exactly where does this healing energy come from?

We've already seen that there is not convincing evidence to regard this energy as a physical phenomenon. Biblically, this seems to leave only two main options. Either the energy comes from God, or it does not. Although the International Center for Reiki Training declares that "Reiki comes from God," we've already seen that this cannot be the God of the Bible. Is it possible, then, that the source of this energy is demonic?

As I mentioned previously, the ability to channel life force energy involves first going through an attunement process. The Center claims that these attunements are attended "by Reiki guides and other spiritual beings who help implement the process."[\[20\]](#) Is it possible that by involving themselves with spirit guides, Reiki practitioners may unwittingly be opening themselves, as well as their patients, to demonic influences? Although it may not be possible to categorically affirm that



the source of Reiki energy medicine is demonic, the Bible, in condemning all forms of spiritism, does seem to at least allow for this possibility (see Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Deut. 18:9-14; Acts 16:16-18). Therefore, it seems to me that Christians should take the wiser, safer, and probably even healthier course of action, and carefully avoid all involvement with Reiki energy medicine.

## Notes

1. Donald O'Mathuna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001), 193.
2. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).
3. Gary P. Stewart, et al. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What is Not?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998), 61.
4. "Reiki FAQ: How Does Reiki Work?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/HowDoesReikiWork.html).
5. David F. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners: Mastering Natural Healing Techniques* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Publications, 2000), 41-42.
6. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 195. I have relied heavily on the chapter on "Energy Medicine," pp. 193-99, in this section.
7. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
8. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 197.
9. Vennells, *Reiki for Beginners*, 106.
10. Libby Barnett, Maggie Chambers and Susan Davidson, *Reiki Energy Medicine* (Rochester, Vt.: Healing Arts Press, 1996), 15.
11. Ibid., 29.
12. Mathuna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 115. I have relied heavily on chapter 10, "How Science Tests Therapies and Remedies," in this section.
13. Ibid., 116.
14. Ibid., 118.



15. Ibid., 124.

16. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House Publishers, 1996), 487.

17. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).

18. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).

19. "Reiki FAQ: What is Reiki?" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/WhatIsReiki.html).

20. "Reiki FAQ: Learning Reiki" at [www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html](http://www.reiki.org/FAQ/LearningReiki.html).

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# Alternative Medicine – A Christian Perspective

*Dr. Pat Zukeran applies a biblical worldview perspective as he assesses the rise of alternative medicine in the mainstream of American culture. He points out the types that are purely fraud and those which may be useful for some people.*



*This article is also available in [Spanish](#).*

## The Rise of Alternative Medicine

Alternative medicine has blazed its way into the mainstream of American culture while also making significant gains in the medical community. Nearly half of all U.S. adults now participate in some kind of alternative therapy.<sup>{1}</sup> A recent study showed that Americans spend almost \$30 billion a year on alternative treatments.<sup>{2}</sup>

Alternative medicine remains a controversial issue. Do these medicines actually work? Do these alternative therapies embrace an Eastern religious system? Should Christians be involved with alternative treatments? How do we evaluate a particular practice that is unconventional?

The sudden rise of alternative medicine can be attributed to a growing dissatisfaction with conventional medical practices. Modern methods have mainly focused on the physical symptoms. However, we are spiritual, social and emotional creatures as well. Healing improves when all of these components are addressed. Conventional medicine has also been criticized for its impersonal approach. Overworked doctors may spend only a few minutes diagnosing the problem without much follow-up.

The main reason people may be flocking to alternative medicine is that it offers hope when conventional medicine has failed. The frightened and discouraged look there as a last resort. Many therapists profess to heal cancer or know the secret to prolonged youth. For example, Hollywood guru Deepak Chopra writes that his therapies can take us to “. . . a place where the rules of everyday existence do not apply.” Through his methods we can “. . . become pioneers in a land where youthful vigor, renewal, creativity, joy, fulfillment, and timelessness are the common experience of everyday life, where old age, senility, infirmity and death do not exist and are not even entertained as a philosophy.”<sup>{3}</sup> These are attractive temptations to those without hope.

As discerning individuals, we must not be enticed by such claims. The Bible teaches that we live in a fallen world. Despite our best efforts people get sick, and sometimes they die. When faced with a serious illness, we first must accept the consequences of the Fall. God can heal any time He chooses using whatever method He wills. However, He does not work contrary to His nature or revealed truth. If an apparent healing leads someone to embrace teachings contrary to Scripture, we should question whether that healing came from

God.

So when the test results are bad, we should not panic in fear, but trust God's sovereignty and control over our lives. We should seek wise counsel from doctors and our pastors. Then, if an alternative medicine is recommended, we should make sure it has been medically tested and does not promote a false teaching or false hope. In dealing with illness, we can honor God or we can blemish our testimony. In the following sections, let us consider how to wisely evaluate alternative medicines.

## **Getting a Handle on Alternative Medicines**

Today there are hundreds of therapies labeled "alternative medicine," but what exactly does that mean? A broad definition would be any therapy that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment of our culture. There are several characteristics of alternative medicine. For example, these therapies are not practiced in hospitals or physicians' offices. They focus on natural methods of healing with an emphasis on preventing disease. They are also more likely to treat chronic ailments after conventional medicine has failed.

Alternative medicine originates from the traditions of ancient cultures, particularly China and India. For instance, 370 different healing drugs were used in Mesopotamia while 600 were common in India. The Chinese had 2000 herbs, metals, and minerals as ingredients in 16,000 different preparations.[\[4\]](#) Despite the variety, many historians agree that these ancient medical practices had little success in actually curing disease. The real effects are still under scrutiny today including comparisons with the strides made by modern medicine. Despite the shortfalls of conventional medicine, we live longer and are healthier than people of long ago.

Ancient alternative medicine was greatly influenced by Eastern religions. That is why today's users of so-called

“rediscovered” alternative medicines can still see those religious concepts interwoven with the treatments. Many alternative medicine proponents approach holistic health from a pantheistic worldview. Central to pantheism is the idea of monism—the idea that everything in the universe is one ultimate reality. If all is one, then man is divine. Since we are divine, we are without sin. Sin is merely an illusion that creates false guilt. This guilt is what leads to illness.

Deepak Chopra writes, “. . . the seeds of God are inside us. . . . When we make the journey of the spirit, we water these divine seeds. . . . In the eyes of the spirit, everyone is innocent, in all senses of the word. Because you are innocent, you have not done anything that merits punishment or divine wrath.”[\[5\]](#)

Some advocates of alternative medicine would point out that the biblical view of health is also considered holistic. Indeed, God made man a complex being with physical, mental, social and spiritual dimensions, and He cares about every aspect of our personhood. (You can see these aspects in Hebrews 4:12 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23.) Contrary to pantheism, the Bible teaches God is a personal being and we are His created beings. We were meant for a personal relationship with Him, but we are separated from this by sin. Biblical health begins with a right relationship with a personal God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Rather than ignoring sin, it must be dealt with through repentance and restoration. Finally, a Christian must acknowledge that God may have a purpose for suffering, and that there is value to yielding to His plan.

## **Should a Christian Use Alternative Medicine?**

When it comes to selecting an alternative therapy, there is a smorgasbord of choices. How can a Christian discern an acceptable alternative medicine from one that is unacceptable?

In making a decision, it is helpful to identify the different alternative medicines. The authors of *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not?*[\[6\]](#) give five categories of alternative therapies.

The first category is *complementary* therapies. These deal with lifestyle issues such as diet, exercise and stress. The next category is *scientifically unproven* therapies. These have undergone scientific research, but with little evidence for their effectiveness. Herbal remedies would be an example of scientifically unproven therapies.

A third category is *scientifically questionable* therapies. These are therapies which contradict basic scientific principles or that cannot be easily verified. An example is Chinese acupuncture that teaches a contradictory understanding to what is known about human physiology. A fourth category is *life energy* therapies. These assume life energy called “Chi” or “Prana” that can be manipulated using a variety of techniques. Maybe you have heard of “[Reiki](#)” and therapeutic touch. The final category of therapies is *quackery* and *fraud*. These are therapies that have been shown to have no reasonable benefit.

Before deciding to use an alternative medicine, a Christian should consider first under which category the particular therapy falls. Generally speaking, complementary therapies provide important insights into maintaining good health. Scientifically unproven and questionable therapy must be studied and decisions made on a case-by-case basis. Many of the proofs for alternative medicine are based on controversial interpretations of scientific theories or testimonies of users.[\[7\]](#) The wisest approach is to only use cures endorsed by sound medical research and controlled testing. Christians should avoid therapies that fall under the life energy and fraud categories.

Consult your physician and pharmacist. Too often individuals

will engage in alternative treatments without informing their physician. Proponents of alternative medicine try to discourage their clients from using conventional medical methods, claiming their way to be the best. This can be a dangerous concept. An alternative therapist may prescribe approaches contrary to your doctor's recommendation, or give you medicines that may react negatively with your prescribed medications.

Finally, be a wise steward. Don't spend your resources on therapies that have been proved ineffective or questionable. Watch out for practitioners of a false religious system. In my pastoral experience, I have witnessed Christians turn to shamans and Chinese folk medicine when diagnosed with a serious illness. In all cases the alternative therapy did not help the situation and cost the family monetarily. More importantly, it impaired their witness for Christ. Make your lifestyle, especially the way you handle illness, a testimony for Christ.

## Life Energy Therapies

As mentioned earlier, there are five categories of alternative medicines. Christians should avoid *life energy* and *quackery* and *fraud* therapies.

Let us take a careful look at life energy therapies. Although there are over 60 different names for these therapies, they are all based on six fundamental principles.<sup>[8]</sup> Practitioners believe that life energy flows throughout the universe. There are numerous names for this impersonal energy. Traditional Chinese medicine calls this energy "Chi" while Indian Ayurvedic medicine titles it "Prana." Some Christians mistakenly equate this with the Holy Spirit. The two are not the same.

Life energy therapists believe that humans are composed of energy surrounded by a material body. Life energy therapy

directs this energy so that it flows throughout the body unhindered. Disease is believed to be the result of an imbalance or blockage in the energy flow. Traditional Chinese medicine describes an elaborate system of channels within the body called meridians. To cure an illness, the body must be manipulated to restore the flow of energy through the meridians.

Traditional Chinese and Indian practitioners believe they can determine one's energy flow by looking at the skin color, symptoms, tongue, and pulse. Therapeutic touch practitioners say they can sense the energy flow by moving their hands above the skin. Supposedly there are now high tech machines that can measure this energy flow. Many of these machines, for example the Vegatest and its spin-offs, have been deemed fraudulent and are illegal.[\[9\]](#)

It is said that life energy can be re-directed to treat an offending illness. Life energy therapists believe they can adjust the flow of energy through physical manipulation or invisible transfer from healer to patient. In traditional Chinese medicine, needles are used to unplug holes or stimulate the flow of this energy. Massage, exercise, and herbs are also believed to restore Chi as are breathing and meditation techniques.

Miracles are believed to occur by altering the life energy. This is the message presented in *Star Wars*. In the movie, the Jedi masters could control the life energy, or Force, to perform miraculous feats. The concept of God and energy are used interchangeably. From this we can conclude that life energy is, in essence, God. Since we are energy, we are divine because we are of the same essence as the Divine.

Christians should avoid therapists who expound life energy therapy. Many ideas are built on a pantheistic worldview, causing these therapies to embrace or at least acknowledge Eastern mysticism. Also, their teachings have drifted far from



objective knowledge of the human body. Finally, God is not an impersonal force, and He cannot be manipulated by formulas or healing rituals. God will not heal through any practice that is contrary to His Word.

## Herbal Treatments

Wherever you look, it seems like there is an infomercial or ad for herbal products. According to a 1998 study in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, between 1990 and 1997, there was a 380 percent rise in herbal remedies and a 130 percent increase in high dose vitamin use in the US.<sup>{10}</sup> Current estimates say 60-72 million Americans use herbal supplements.<sup>{11}</sup> Many herbal treatments make remarkable claims of healing cancer, arthritis, depression, and other illnesses. What are we to make of the herbal craze?

Be discerning if you choose to use herbs. *Natural* does not guarantee *safe*. There are many natural herbs that can produce dangerous, and even deadly, side effects. Be wary of the marketing hype. Despite the ads, the truth of the matter is that research has concluded that the effectiveness of herbal use is questionable at best. You also need to consider quality control. Unlike prescription and non-prescription drugs that are tightly regulated by the FDA, no organization is directly responsible for monitoring the quality or concentrations of herbal products. Be skeptical of “a pill for every ill” mentality. Finally, be sure to avoid anyone who claims to have a secret formula, especially if he reports to have been persecuted by the American Medical Association or Federal Drug Administration. Avoid any retailer, radio ad, or person who is bent on selling his product as a cure-all.

Some herbal treatments are costly and provide no enhancement. However, some herbal supplements *have* shown some promising benefits. Herbal treatments may prove to be helpful additions to conventional treatments. Herbs like ginseng have shown to be beneficial for Type 2 diabetes, for example. Herbal



preparations are sometimes less potent in dosage than prescriptions drugs and may be less toxic.

It is important to thoroughly research the product you are considering using. Inform your doctor and pharmacist. They know your medical history and can alert you to any potentially dangerous interactions between herbs and pharmaceutical drugs. Be leery of thinking that if taking a little is good, a heavier dose must be even better. Find out whether the herbs are for long or short term. Check the quality of the product and be aware of the possible side effects. Don't assume that if the product has been used for a while, even for centuries, it must be better.

There is no biblical admonition forbidding the use of herbal products. However, Christians should approach the herbal market from an informed perspective. Some excellent books on the subject are *The American Pharmaceutical Association Practical Guide to Natural Medicines* and *Alternative Medicine: A Christian Handbook*. Excellent Web sites include [herbalgram.com](http://herbalgram.com) and [naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com/](http://naturalmedicines.therapeuticresearch.com/).

In times of health and especially in dealing with illness, our goal is always to honor the Lord.

## Notes

1. Geoffrey Cowley, "Alternative Care," *Newsweek Magazine*, 2 December 2002, p. 47.
2. Ibid., p. 47-48.
3. Deepak Chopra, *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind: The Quantum Alternative to Growing Old*, (New York: Harmony, 1993), p. 3.
4. Dónal O'Mathúna & Walt Larimore, *Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing, 2001) p. 31.
5. Deepak Chopra, *Seven Spiritual Laws for Parents* (New York:

Harmony/Random

House Publishing, 1997), p. 20-21, 31, 57, 68.

6. *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What Is Good and What Is Not?*

*BioBasic Series* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1998).

7. O'Mathúna & Larimore, *Alternative Medicine*, 22.

8. John Ankerberg & John Weldon, *Can You Trust Your Doctor? The Complete Guide to*

*New Age Medicine and Its Threat To Your Family* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991) p. 46.

9. Paul Reisser, Dale Mabe and Robert Velarde, *Examining Alternative Medicine*

(Downer's Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001), p. 85-86.

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11. Ibid.

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6. Underwood, Anne. "Learning from China." *Newsweek Magazine*.

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