

## A medical intuitive -- or just wishful thinking?: The U.S. spiritual advisor Almine Barton introduced the family to 'alternative' medicine, and told them something else: that Bryan Farnum himself had the gift of healing. And so Farnum closed his financial consulting business.

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Illustration: Black & White Photo: James Pattyn, National Post / "God is in each one of us," says Bryan Farnum, "so our thoughts can change chemical structures in our body, our thoughts can make us ill, our thoughts can make us well."

Black & White Photo: Sarah Fraleigh, The Canadian Press / After one course of chemo, Bryan and Cathy Farnum withdrew their son Michael from Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children and prayed to God for him to be healed.

Bryan Farnum talks to God. Then again, much of the planet does the same -- which, given the current state of things, might mean we require more volume in the transmission. Yet when Farnum speaks, God not only listens, but answers back. Not in a "dump your stocks and buy gold, frankincense and myrrh" kind of way, but in one that has thousands of people seeking help from what Farnum calls his "gift."

Indeed, God has told Farnum only three other people in the world have this particular gift: an ability to see into the lives and bodies of people, and to determine what ails them -- past, present and future. Farnum has variously called himself a "medical intuitive," a "universal intuitive" and, now, a "Prophet of God." While history has no shortage of charlatans reaping the dividends of human gullibility, bit by bit, members of the professionally skeptical world of science and medicine are coming around to the view that Bryan Farnum just might be for real.

On a mild winter evening, 150 people fill the Vancouver Planetarium's MacMillan Space Centre theatre to hear Farnum's story, which he tells with folksy ease and self-deprecation. The heroic pictures of Canadian astronauts mounted on the walls might tempt a cynic to suggest a trip to outer space is the appropriate metaphor for the evening at hand. But this crowd crosses age and sex and ethnic demographic lines, and these serious, respectful middle-class people are here because they have heard Bryan Farnum can work miracles.

At a tanned and robust 6-foot-4, the 44-year-old Farnum could be a former CFL lineman giving one of those inspirational talks athletes give about finding religion. But Farnum's lectures, his Web site ([www.onlygodheals.com](http://www.onlygodheals.com)) and his twice-weekly guest spot on Healthy Talk Radio in the United States ([www.healthytalkradio.com](http://www.healthytalkradio.com)), with a listening audience of 10 million ("Maybe just 50,000 of them in Canada," Farnum says, "because people have to listen here on the Internet") is about a kind of inspiration in reverse. It was God who found him,

Farnum says, giving him both a gift and a global mission.

The gift came to him the hard way. In 1998, Farnum, then running his own financial consultancy after stints as an advisor at Castor Holdings and Guaranty Trust in Toronto, and his second wife, Cathy, were told their four-year-old son Michael, the youngest of their five children, had brain cancer. Farnum says he went into "total numbness for about a month."

"We asked the Hospital for Sick Children what were his chances of surviving. They had no idea. I mean, they had NO idea."

The hospital did, however, have a plan: risky brain surgery. Farnum had other ideas. Having grown up attending Unity Church in Toronto as the middle child in a family of eight, headed by a father who did the occasional "laying on of hands," Farnum turned to God. He knelt and made the Almighty the kind of proposition He gets all the time: If God spared Michael, then Bryan Farnum would spend the rest of his days serving God.

God didn't reply right away. Michael survived brain surgery; then the hospital prescribed 18 months of chemotherapy and eight weeks of radiation. There was a litany of attendant risks: damaged spine, permanent hair loss, reduced intelligence and high probability of developing another cancer within 10 years--if Michael survived the treatment at all, the odds of which the oncology staff pegged at a depressing 20%.

Farnum and his wife agreed to one course of chemo for their son. Just before the second course was to begin, Cathy sought out the hospital's chief oncologist and asked him how many families chose no treatment. "He said, 'About half.' Then I said, 'How are those kids doing?' He said, 'They do about the same.'"

The Farnums decided to pull Michael out of

treatment, influenced by a letter Cathy's father, who died of cancer, had left behind. "It said if any family member got cancer," says Cathy, "they were not to have radiation." Given Farnum's faith-healing background -- and his desperate wish to help his son -- Farnum was open to anything. So he and his wife went to see Almine Barton, a U.S. "spiritual advisor" and intuitive healer, who was speaking in Toronto.

"We walked into the hotel room and there she was, a very tall, beautiful blonde woman. I've never seen a woman so beautiful," Farnum says. "She was like an angel." Barton introduced the family to "alternative" medicine, and told them something else: that Bryan Farnum himself had the gift of healing.

And so Farnum closed his financial consulting business, as he and Cathy embarked on a crash course in how to heal the body outside the scope of conventional medicine. In the autumn of 1998, Farnum went to Oregon to visit Barton and began doing group meditation in a cave -- an experience he describes as one of "total comfort." While in the cave "a blue-indigo light actually went into my head," he says. "I opened my eyes. I wanted to see if the sky was blue, but it was red, bright red. So I closed my eyes and there's that blue indigo again. And when I came out of the cave, all I had to do was ask God, and I would be given the information."

Farnum aggressively treated Michael's cancer with herbs, ones his connection to God told him would work against the boy's tumour. He also modified Michael's diet, and he prayed. His family stood behind him. "Even Bryan's mother, who thought we were crazy, defended us," Cathy Farnum says. "A lot of friends didn't know what they'd do if faced with the same situation, but they knew we had to do what we did."

Farnum's methods may puzzle many -- and anger some -- who believe science is the only god to be worshipped. Still, there's a compelling fact that invites skeptics to hear Farnum out: Five years after a terminal-cancer diagnosis, Michael is alive and well. "We just took him out of the hospital and never looked back," says Cathy. "Faith kept us from the doctors."

Farnum has since "treated" hundreds of other seriously ill people, often with results that have baffled their own doctors. The problem is, the doctors won't talk about these patients or their results, citing patient confidentiality. Farnum is keenly aware of this, and has been pleading with the medical establishment to talk to him -- in fact, to test him out on the scientific stage, with the tests and the results transparent and public. It would be the closest thing to mainstream recognition faith healing has yet seen. And more important for Farnum, it would be a forum in which to accomplish his Big Mission: "to bridge the gap between God to science."

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Humankind has always found the road to Wellville a trip both mysterious and powerful, and it is a path piled high with the debris of theories, fads and false gods -- and no small amount of money. The last century saw science and religion butting heads, offering longer or eternal life, respectively. But now these opponents are becoming allies of sorts. During the past few years, several serious academic studies have suggested prayer has power to heal, and at least 80 of 125 medical schools in the United States offer courses in religion and medicine. A March, 2002, study in the International Journal of Psychiatry in Medicine reports that religion -- and especially attending religious services -- can significantly affect how you die of diseases other than cancer. People who didn't regularly go to church, synagogue or mosque were twice as likely to die of non-cancerous digestive diseases, 21% more likely to die of cardiovascular disease, and 66% more likely to die of respiratory diseases.

For the past five years Bryan Farnum has been trying to exercise some such power to heal, from his comfortable, 4,300-square-foot home in Richmond Hill, Ont. Thousands of people a month -- either in person, or over the phone -- have sought him out for readings of their ill bodies, and advice. Farnum, though, his eye set on a larger constituency, has stopped his private consultations (with a few exceptions) in favour of working with the broader medical and scientific community to tap this unusual gift.

According to Farnum, the gift works like this: His eyes fixed on the ceiling, his right hand twitching, he goes into a light trance and silently asks God such things as "Can trauma cause illness?" to which God will answer yes or no. Farnum calls these Q&As with God "discernments," a dialogue that lets him probe the reasons for a person's particular illness. Those reasons range from chemical imbalance in the body, to some molecular defect, to trauma, or all of the above, and Farnum's suggested treatment has varied, using herbs, or essential oils, and always faith, often in consort with conventional medicine, to lead the patient back to wellness.

One "conventional medic" who will go on the record about Farnum is Dr. Florence Yakura, who has practised family medicine in Vancouver for 25 years and is now discussing the mysteries of multiple sclerosis with Farnum. "I had about 12 patients who have volunteered to see him, who have chronic conditions which are not solvable in the usual branches of medicine. Of the 12, there was one individual that he could not work with, and of the others, I would say that every one of them has been helped mentally, emotionally and spiritually by visiting him.

"Now, whatever he does, I'm not exactly sure, but he seems to have helped them on that level."

There are striking similarities in patients' reports of their sessions with Farnum. They often say he taps into personal histories that only close family members know or reveals something conventional medicine hasn't seen. While dozens of Farnum's clients were interviewed for this story, two of them typify the kind of thing people say Farnum has done for them.

There's Jane Doe (she prefers not to be identified), a social worker in small-town Ontario. She doesn't think her clients are ready for her to "come out," as it were. She was diagnosed with aggressive uterine cancer in May, 2000, and was told the only possible solution was a complete hysterectomy. Stunned, she took up a friend's suggestion to see Farnum, who discerned details of her life that, she says, "I didn't talk about. I mean, he didn't know me. But he would discern things that were very accurate -- something to do with a relationship, or a relationship with a parent."

For the next six months, "against the advice of my doctor," she tried Farnum's combination of herbs, hands-on-healing and prayer, though she says she isn't formally religious, just trying to "get some spiritual connection." Under his guidance, she also investigated her surgical options, and underwent a partial hysterectomy in September, 2000. "When I asked the doctor the day after the surgery what he had found, he said, 'There was no visible cancer.'" Three years later, Jane's cancer has not returned, and she continues to work with Farnum on "emotional clearing."

Then there's Shelley Routley, a Vancouver resident who said she first had heard talk of Farnum around the office in 2000, when her employer, Omega Nutrition, was exploring a business partnership with him. Routley was already practising some herbal medicine, but at age 35, and trying unsuccessfully to get pregnant, she decided to go see him. Farnum told her to take a yucca tincture to improve her fertility, which she did, and about a month after Routley started taking the herb, she got pregnant. "Sure, it could be a coincidence," she says, "but it was kind of interesting that it happened a month after."

Routley planned for a home birth attended by a midwife. She was shocked when Farnum adamantly told her no.

"He said, 'You cannot deliver at home, there's going to be complications if you do. You need a doctor.' I kept trying to force the midwife issue, so he said, 'There's a chance you could die and you're going to bleed.' And he said, 'The baby is not positioned right.'"

Her doctors had not flagged either the baby's position or the risk of bleeding. Reluctantly, she took Farnum's advice.

"It was a very, very traumatic delivery," she says, lasting two days and requiring four inducements. The baby was indeed positioned incorrectly and went into distress. "After he was born, I had a post-partum hemorrhage. Everything Bryan said basically happened."

Farnum is quick to point out he is just the messenger. "When we say only God heals, God is in each one of us, so our thoughts can change chemical structures in our body, our thoughts can make us ill, our thoughts can make us well. And so our thoughts can even heal us because everything is chemical."

Yet here's where Farnum's story takes an unexpected twist, for in his cosmology, it's God who makes us ill too -- or rather, our transgression of divine law as expressed in the Ten Commandments. In order to get better, Farnum says, people have to repent their sins -- or as he puts it, to reset "their internal software package." Farnum believes his own wild skirt-chasing days, before he met his wife, Cathy, directly led to his own son's brain cancer. - - -Medicine is certainly taking the mind-body connection more seriously. One Toronto pain-management physician thinks it critical to serious cases of chronic pain that pharmaceuticals and physical therapy have not alleviated.

"Bryan's saying that an awful lot of physical stuff is due to anger, bitterness, negative feelings that had never actually been looked at and dealt with," she says. With regret, she insists on anonymity because "the medical profession aren't ready to accept the stuff that Bryan is propounding."

She argues medicine and Farnum are on the same track. "It's just that he is able to pass that on to people as if it's coming from God, and probably is," she says, "whereas I'm able to pass it on to people saying, 'You know what, everybody that comes to the chronic pain clinic seems to have an incredibly strong history of mental torment, anguish, abuse, whatever you want to call it, that you guys haven't dealt with. The brain is now tricking you into thinking that to have pain is easier.'"

Unlike many alternative practitioners, Farnum repeatedly stresses his respect for physicians and insists people must continue to see their doctors. And then there is the doctor who continues to see Farnum. And is publicly happy to say so.

Dr. William MacKay, a neurophysiologist who is an associate professor in the Department of Physiology at the University of Toronto, has worked with Farnum since the summer of 1999, when MacKay's technician told him about an "intuitive" who was keen to interact with academics.

So in the spirit of scholarly inquiry, MacKay made the trek up to Farnum's home and was hooked. "I

could tell within a few minutes that he was a perfectly genuine individual, who was not putting on any airs, or pretending," says MacKay, who was fascinated by Farnum's claim to have the Creator's ear. "He honestly believed that he was communicating with what he calls God. Now, I don't know exactly what that is, and it doesn't really matter to me."

MacKay does think Farnum's God-given theory can be supported by science. "I am convinced that all chronic disease starts in an unbalanced autonomic nervous system. And the source of that imbalance is inevitably a major mental or emotional shock which is suppressed and festers, instead of being freely acknowledged and cleansed from the system."

Each week, MacKay and any interested medical parties gather at Farnum's home to work on unlocking the mysteries of the entire human body. MacKay will ask Farnum a question, which he in turn asks God, and then comes back with an answer, which itself often provides a challenge. "Bryan's got a very superficial knowledge, sometimes no knowledge at all of what he's talking about."

MacKay says, for instance, he was "astonished at the things Farnum would latch on to," such as when Farnum intuited one of his universal theories on how body acid provokes cancer, and how to fight it. "He has no physiology background or medicine," says MacKay, "yet this concept is really fundamental to health and physiology," and increasingly accepted in conventional medicine. "We were talking about that for weeks, about foods that increase the alkalinity."

"Now, he's not infallible, of course," MacKay says. But the same is true of neurophysiology. "If you're going to take Bryan seriously, then you have to admit that there are thoughts and energies outside of what we call the brain. It's a perfectly sound hypothesis -- very difficult to test -- but it's just as valid as the opposite hypothesis that everything is generated by neurons, somehow initiating thought, though nobody knows how. It's just as big a mystery."

MacKay dismisses the notion that Farnum might just be a voracious reader with a photographic memory. "I know he isn't!"

Farnum admits reading isn't his strong suit and recounts the grief he got from his father who "didn't have the patience to understand why I was not learning at school." Reading was hard, and Farnum says it still is.

"I can read, no problem, but the information is not retained," so instead he listens to audio books, especially the King James Bible. And he prays when he wakes, and when he goes to sleep, repenting his sins and asking God to illumine his path on the road to healing the world.

Still, Farnum's mission has a distinctly commercial

side to it, perhaps no surprise given his business career. When he was seeing individuals, Farnum asked for a \$75 donation. Several of his clients said he often waived it, and paid out of his own pocket for the herbs he recommended.

Now, though, with his stated aim of helping the entire planet, Farnum has joined forces with the corporate world, in order to cut a broader scientific swath while still keeping the family "comfortable and middle-class." He says this means an income approaching \$60,000 a year-- and not, say, \$600,000, a suggestion that seems to shock him.

One of Farnum's ventures is with Omega Nutrition, a health products company based in Vancouver and Bellingham, Wash. Farnum says he sought out Omega's founders, Robert Gaffney and Bob Walberg, after he discerned their company was a cut above the rest, and called them out of the blue to say God had told him he should work with them.

"I'm an herbalist, I've been around psychics, seen all this New Age stuff, so I was a bit skeptical when I first got this call," says Walberg. "But something inside of me said, 'I should still check this out.'"

Like MacKay, Walberg found Farnum intriguing. Together, Omega and Farnum have launched their Bryson Garden Remedies line of products (Bryan + Son Michael = Bryson), introducing Bryson Primer # 1, a tincture to cleanse the body of ammonia, chlorine and mercury, and Bryson Greens, a cell-cleansing, energy-boosting powder.

Farnum is also doing exploratory discernments for a large Canadian vitamin company -- though, at the moment, he's doing them for free.

Indeed, Farnum says a recent experience with a British pharmaceutical company has pointed up the conflict between his public mission and the commercial possibilities of his gift. After discerning an antibiotic the company was developing was incomplete -- and saving the Harley Street Group "eight years on research costs," according to its director, Nigel Fenner-Frownes -- Farnum put on the brakes.

"It was a test of me," says Farnum. "Do I go the commercial way or go God's way? -- which is a slower and much more difficult road. I decided to go the slower and much more difficult road. I have to be careful not to abuse my gift. I don't want to lose my gift."

What Farnum wishes most, though, is for the scientific world to take up the gift he offers. "I've been crying out, 'Just put me in a room with the brightest minds, with 20 scientists, for one day, and let them grill me about anything that they're not sure about on a scientific level,'" Farnum says. "Just grill me."

After a stalled flirtation with the complementary medicine program at Harvard University, Farnum has finally got the ear of Lions Gate Hospital in North Vancouver in the guise of Dr. Cynthia Hamilton, a researcher in nuclear medicine and the hospital's co-ordinator of clinical trials.

"I have a reputation for being a person who leans the way I lean," she laughs. "In terms of having my reputation tarnished, I'm not afraid." Hamilton is working on a pilot study of PET (Positron Emission Tomography) Scan ([www.petscan.ca](http://www.petscan.ca)), a powerful machine that can view a patient's chemical and metabolic structure. PET Scan is intended to provide a more comprehensive look at cancer in its various stages, and for now, the only machine in Canada is in Vancouver.

Hamilton thought she'd tag a medical intuition study on to the pilot, and recruited Farnum and four other North American intuitives who would, over the phone, compile physical and emotional profiles of PET Scan cancer patients based solely on the patients' names and dates of birth.

The results of the intuitives' work are only now being processed. And, while Farnum has great respect for Hamilton and her project, he'd like her to help him develop a five-part Parkinson's test -- from genetic markings to a possible cure -- one he says will save "millions in research costs."

To that end, Hamilton has been trying to connect him to the right doctors at the University of British Columbia, but it's a delicate process.

"I'm trying to be a link," Hamilton says, "but I can't force it. I'm hoping Bryan's going to come to the point where he realizes it will happen in its own time."

Farnum says he realizes it all too well, and that's the problem. "It is difficult for most scientists to get out of their box," he says. "This is no fault of their own -- it simply is the way most scientists are programmed to think. There is a great deal of politics and issues surrounding grants. I pray that Lions Gate and UBC will take me seriously regarding my ability to discern the test for Parkinson's."

Still, Farnum acknowledges his own timetable is not a human one. "I have fully surrendered to God and will only do God's will," he says, though he's not much help in answering why God would pick a reformed womanizing financial consultant to whom to give this immense gift. "I don't know why He picked me."

For now, he will plug on and wait for his summons to a grand stage. "I give all glory to God," he says. "Without Him, I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing today."