LAYING ON OF HANDS

I. Introduction

"Laying on of hands" (or similar phrases like "laid his hands on") appears multiple times in the Bible, primarily in the Old Testament for commissioning, blessing, sacrifice and atonement; and in the New Testament for healing, blessing, commissioning, ordination, and imparting the Holy Spirit. It often symbolizes transfer of authority, blessing, power, or identification.

Here are the main categories and specific examples, focusing on who laid hands, on whom, the result, and whether it was tangible/evident.

II. Old Testament Examples

A. Commissioning/Transfer of Authority (e.g., Moses on Joshua)

- God instructed Moses: "Take Joshua the son of Nun... and lay your hand on him" (Numbers 27:18-23). Moses laid his hands on Joshua before the congregation and Eleazar the priest, inaugurating/commissioning him and transferring some authority.
  - Result: Joshua was "filled with the spirit of wisdom" (Deuteronomy 34:9); the people obeyed him. This was publicly evident and led to his successful leadership.

B. Blessing (e.g., Jacob on Ephraim and Manasseh)

- Jacob/Israel laid his hands (right on younger Ephraim, left on Manasseh, crossing them) and blessed them (Genesis 48:14-15).
  - Result: Imparted blessing and birthright elements; tangible in the sense of declared inheritance and favor.

C. Sacrifices/Atonement

- Worshipers or priests laid hands on animal heads to identify/transfer sin or consecration (e.g., Leviticus 1:4, 3:2-8, 16:21).
  - Result: Symbolic transfer for atonement; the animal was then sacrificed. Not a "healing" or empowerment but a ritual act with evident sacrificial outcome.

III. New Testament Examples

A. Healing (Most Tangible and Evident)

Jesus and others frequently laid hands for physical healing, with immediate, observable results.

- Jesus on the sick (multiple instances):
  - "He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them" (Luke 4:40; see also Mark 6:5).
  - On a woman crippled for 18 years: "He laid his hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and she glorified God" (Luke 13:13).
  - On a blind man (two-step): Jesus laid hands (after spitting on eyes); partial sight first, then full restoration after laying hands again (Mark 8:23-25).
    - Result: Immediate physical healings (diseases, disabilities, blindness) – clearly tangible and evident to witnesses.
- Paul on Publius's father: Paul "prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him" of fever and dysentery (Acts 28:8).
  - Result: Immediate healing; tangible.
- Ananias on Saul/Paul: Ananias laid hands on Saul, saying he was sent so Saul "might receive sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Scales fell from his eyes, and he received sight (Acts 9:17-18).
  - Result: Physical restoration of sight + spiritual filling; immediately evident.

Jesus promised believers: "They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:18).

B. Imparting the Holy Spirit

- Apostles (Peter & John) on Samaritan believers: After baptism, "they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit." Simon saw that the Spirit was given "through the laying on of the apostles' hands" (Acts 8:17-18).
  - Result: Reception of the Holy Spirit, manifested in a way Simon could observe (tangible/spiritual evidence).
- Paul on Ephesian disciples: "When Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied" (Acts 19:6).
  - Result: Immediate speaking in tongues and prophesying — clearly evident.

C. Commissioning/Ordination and Spiritual Gifts

- Apostles on the Seven (Acts 6:6): Prayer + laying hands after selection for service.
- Antioch leaders on Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:3): For missionary sending.
- Elders/presbytery on Timothy: Gift given "by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Timothy 4:14); Paul reminds Timothy to stir up "the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands" (2 Timothy 1:6).
  - Result: Impartation of authority, commissioning, or spiritual gift for ministry (not always a visible miracle, but recognized publicly).
- Blessing children: Jesus "took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16; Matthew 19:13-15).
  - Result: Blessing/prayer; symbolic and relational.

IV. Summary on Tangibility and Evidence

A. Healing contexts

- Almost always tangible and immediately evident (physical recovery, sight restored, straightening, etc., often instantaneous and public)

B. Holy Spirit contexts

- Often accompanied by observable manifestations (tongues, prophecy, visible reception noted by observers like Simon)

C. Commissioning/blessing

- More symbolic (authority transfer, public recognition, spiritual gifting), with longer-term evident fruit (e.g., Joshua's leadership, Timothy's ministry)

Hebrews 6:1-2 lists "laying on of hands" as one of the elementary principles/doctrines of Christ, alongside repentance, faith, baptisms, etc.

The practice is not presented as magical but as a faith-filled act of prayer, identification, or conduit for God's power. Results vary by context but are frequently described with clear, observable outcomes in the biblical accounts.