

## **Introduction**

I'd like to begin by telling you about a person I know who was clinically depressed. Despite seeing an array of psychiatrists and psychologists, he lived a miserable life, confining himself almost exclusively to his parents' basement for over 12 years. But then suddenly, he came out of it and is now happily married and gainfully employed. I ran into him a year ago and asked as we conversed how he explained what happened. **"A Christian woman laid hands on me, asked God to heal me, and He did,"** he replied. It only goes to show you. The Lord is our healer and that's what I'm preaching about today.

## **God Heals the Sick**

James addresses those who are **"sick"** (verse 14). The Greek word translated that is broad enough to encompass both physiological and psychological disorders. 12.7 million Americans have Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). 14.8 million suffer from major depression. To be sick means to be psychologically or physiologically unhealthy because of injury or illness and to **"suffer"** (verse 13) because we are.

Now look at the words **"restore the sick"** in verse 15. That's what the sick want – to be **"restored"** which connotes **"healed."** They want to be made healthy and well again. That's what they want and verse 15 reveals one of the ways they can be. It's by **"the prayer offered in faith,"** what we call **"healing prayer."** A Christian lays hands on a sick person, if possible, asks God to heal him or her, and He does.

God did that then, in the first century, but does He still do it today? Bible-believing Christians called dispensationalists claim He doesn't. They believe that the Apostolic Age, from about 30 to 90 A.D., was a special dispensation. He healed then because it was but He doesn't today. They're wrong though. He does. First, God healing is consistent with His nature. Exodus 15:26, in fact, designates Him **"Yahweh your healer."** Second, it's consistent with the Biblical record. The Bible

nowhere even hints that miracles and healings are confined to specific dispensations. And third, it's consistent with experience. A mass of reliable anecdotal evidence, through the centuries, confirms it.

In his early writings, for instance, St. Augustine taught that healing prayer no longer exists and that the church shouldn't seek it. But in 424 AD, God dramatically healed two sick people during worship services in his church and his skepticism crumbled as a result. He then devoted one of the final sections of his classic work *The City of God* to healings that had taken place in his diocese. He had set up a stringent process for recording and authenticating the healings and wrote this about it: **"Once I realized how many miracles were occurring in our own day, I saw how wrong it would be to allow the memory of these marvels of divine power to perish among our people. It is only two years ago that the keeping of the records was begun here in Hippo, and already, at this writing, we have nearly seventy attested miracles."**

That reminds me of what George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, wrote in his journal some 1200 years later: **"For the Lord made bare His omnipotent arm, and manifested His power, to the astonishment of many, the healing virtue whereby many have been delivered from man great infirmities."**

Contemporary testimonies confirm those of Augustine and Fox and reveal that God still heals and that He does so primarily through prayer.

### **The Place of Healing Prayer**

So let's examine what our text teaches us about that. In verse 16, James commands, **"Pray for one another so that you may be healed."** Notice how simple and unadorned this command is. It conveys that healing prayer should be just a normal part of our ministry and life.

What do people normally do when they get sick? They call on physicians, psychiatrists, or psychologists to treat them and they should. Those practitioners are God's gifts to us and we should go to them. We should rely on medicine in other words.

But we shouldn't rely on medicine alone. We see that in verse 14. James tells us what to do when we get sick. Call on Christians to pray for us, in person if possible. Some Christians rely on healing prayer only after they've tried everything medically first and it fails. But that approach only exposes the materialistic base of our thinking. Verse 14 implies that calling on Christians to pray for us should be just as natural as calling on practitioners to treat us.

Because it should be, I believe the best approach is to pursue healing prayer and medicine at the same time with equal vigor. Why? It's because both are gifts of God. When we're sick, therefore, we should call practitioners for medicine and Christians for prayer.

But what Christians should we call? The Bible tells us.

According to 1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, and 30, God gives some Christians the gift of healing. If we've identified someone like that in our midst, we should call upon him or her to pray for us.

But we aren't limited to Christians with the gift of healing. In verse 14, for instance, James instructs us to call for "**the elders of the church.**" But it isn't just elders. Verse 16 commands, "**pray for one another.**" The words "**one another**" refer not just to elders but to other Christians as well. Verses 16 and 17 go on to qualify those others. They're the "**righteous.**" James' point in mentioning elders and the righteous is this. The Christians we ask to pray for us when we're sick should be spiritually deep – familiar friends of Jesus.

My adopted son Aaron was brain damaged at birth. The first Sunday we had him, we took him to church and asked someone to pray for him. It wasn't just any someone but one of the finest followers of Jesus I've ever known, Ernie Snyder. Ernie prayed and asked God to heal him and He did. Notice two things. We just naturally asked someone to pray for him and the someone we asked was a familiar friend of Jesus.

### **God Doesn't Heal Everyone**

We now know what sick people should do. Ask the gifted or the

righteous to pray for their healing. That doesn't mean though that they'll always be healed if they do. We know from Scripture and experience that not everyone who is prayed for to be healed is healed. Many are not.

John Wimber, who had the most credible and effective healing ministry I've known, made just that point in his book *Power Healing*. He told about a friend of his named David Watson. David was diagnosed with liver cancer and John prayed for him with "**desperation and confidence.**" He even flew to London to pray for him in person. God didn't heal him though and David died. Wimber wrote about that: "**I do not know why he was not healed – I lost one of my closest friends – but I have continued to pray for the sick and always will.**"

The moral of the story is this. First, God doesn't heal everyone for whom righteous people pray. And second, they should keep on praying for the sick anyway. Scripture never qualifies who will be healed. Our task is to pray; God's task is to heal. Our task is to pray for anyone and everyone who asks us to do so. God's task is to touch them.

In the end, we can never know why God does or doesn't heal a person. James does reveal, however, three elements that are essential to successful healing prayer. Let's identify and examine each one.

## **Faith**

The first element is found in verse 15. Notice what kind of prayer restores the sick. It's prayer offered "**in faith.**" Faith is the medium through which God releases His healing power. Almost all divine healing is a consequence of someone's faith in Him. By faith, I mean the belief and confidence that He can and will heal.

Obviously, it's best if the person being prayed for has such faith. But it isn't actually necessary that he or she does. The Bible records many instances of someone else having the required faith. That someone else can be the person praying, the sick person's family and friends, or even witnesses to the prayer. That explains why John Wimber did what he did. When he prayed for the sick, he always looked among those who

were present for people with faith. If he identified any, he then instructed them to place their hands on or near the body part that needed healing. Anyway, successful healing prayer usually requires that someone have it – the belief and confidence that God can and will heal.

But please know something in that regard. In the Bible, no sick person is ever chastised for lack of faith. That means that sick people shouldn't beat themselves up for not being healed. They should just go on loving God and trusting their bodily existence to Him.

So that's the first element that's essential to successful healing prayer. Someone needs to have faith in God. Someone needs to believe that He can and will heal.

### **Commitment**

There's a second essential element. It's commitment to God.

One of the instructive details in our text is the connection it makes between healing on the one hand and the sins of the sick on the other. Verse 15 talks about sick people's sins being forgiven after they're prayed for. Since forgiveness requires repentance, we can assume they confessed those sins. Verse 16 then links that confession of sins with healing prayer. The confessing and praying go together.

Those verses imply something vital. God normally does not touch people physically without touching them spiritually. Oswald Chambers contended just that and he was right. That means if sick people want God to touch them physically but not spiritually, He usually won't.

In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, C.S. Lewis told about praying with childlike faith that God would heal his cancer stricken mother. He didn't though and she died. Reflecting on his prayer, Lewis said that it was utterly irreligious in this sense. He wanted God to come, heal his mother, and then go away. He wrote: **"It never crossed my mind that the tremendous contact which I solicited should have any consequences beyond restoring the status quo."**

That's a penetrating insight. Many sick people want God to restore

the status quo and no more. They want Him to come, heal them, and then leave them alone as they were before. They want Him to heal their bodies but not run their lives. That hinders healing though because He usually touches people physically only if they allow Him to touch them spiritually as well. Sick people need to commit themselves to God. They need to ask Him to come, heal them, and stay. They must want and ask Him to run their lives as well as heal their bodies.

## **Boldness**

There's a third element that's essential to successful healing prayer. It's found in the word "**earnestly**" in verses 17. The Greek word translated that suggests boldness or forcefulness. That's how Elijah prayed in 1 Kings 17 and 18 and so should we. We shouldn't weaken our requests with if's, and's, or but's. We should speak forth a straightforward declaration of the healing that is needed instead. I've heard several pastors pray and ask God to heal sick persons "**if it's your will.**" In my view, we shouldn't pray like that. On the contrary, we should ask, without waffling, for the healing that the sick person needs.

Martin Luther's prayer for his sick friend Philip Melanchthon is our model for this. He described how he prayed for him this way: "**I besought the Almighty with great vigor . . . . quoting from Scriptures all the promises I could remember, that prayer should be granted, and said that He must grant my request, if I was henceforth to put faith in His promises.**" Luther prayed for healing as Elijah prayed for drought and rain, boldly, and so should we.

## **Conclusion**

We now know what we should do. If we're the sick, we should ask the righteous to pray that God will heal us and run our lives. If we're the righteous who are asked to pray that, we should do so boldly. Why? The reason is simple and clear. Yahweh is our healer.