

INTRODUCTION

In the passage I read, James 5:13-18, James asks a question. Is anyone among you sick? Consider the following: cancer, shingles, ruptured discs, colitis, bi-polar, depression, schizophrenia, rheumatoid arthritis, TMJ, torn ligaments, and glaucoma. Those are just a few of the many injuries and illnesses that people I've known over the years have had. Is anyone among you sick? The answer is a resounding "yes." Many among us are sick, including some of you right now!

So what should we do when we're sick, meaning injured or ill? James 5:13-18 tells us and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

HEALING

Let's start with the words "*suffering*" in verse 13 and "*sick*" in verses 14 and 15. Those words are broad enough to encompass both organic and psychological disorders. Something is seriously wrong with someone physically, mentally, or emotionally. Thus, the cancer victim and the schizophrenic are both "suffering" or "sick."

Now look at the words "*restore the one who is sick*" in verse 15. That is what all of us who are sick or who have loved ones that are sick want. We want the damaged body or spirit "restored" or as we usually say it "healed." We want it to be made healthy and well again.

That's what we want and verse 15 reveals one of the ways that we can get it. It's through what James calls "*the prayer offered in faith.*" What he's talking about here is what we call healing prayer. Christians ask God to heal a sick person and He does.

I read about two Christians praying for a woman named Suzy who had a cancerous lung tumor and a mangled kneecap. They asked God to heal her and He did. She actually felt the tumor disappear as they prayed, she said, and X-rays the next week showed that it was gone. And her kneecap, which was hard to find and rigid before, is now easily visible and moves as it should, enabling her to walk normally.

God healed her through prayer and that's what I'm going to preach about the rest of our time together today – healing prayer.

THE PLACE OF HEALING PRAYER

The first issue I want to address is the place of healing prayer. Look at the James' command in verse 16, "*Pray for one another so that you may be healed.*" Notice how simple and unadorned it is. That shows us what healing prayer was to early Christians – a normal part of their ministry and life. And that's what it should be to us as well.

What do people normally do when they're sick? They call physicians, psychiatrists, or psychologists to treat them and they should. Those practitioners are God's friends and His 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're sick. Call on Christians to pray for us. Some Christians rely on healing prayer only when they're tried everything medically first and it fails. But that approach betrays the materialistic base of our thinking. Verse 14 teaches us that calling on Christians to pray for us should be just as natural to us as calling on practitioners to treat us.

Based on that, I believe that 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. So, when we're sick, we should call practitioners for medicine and Christians for prayer.

I know a Christian husband and wife whose adult son is in a chronic and debilitating depression. It's so bad that he can't even work. He's seen numerous psychiatrists and psychologists and been on every medication for depression under the sun. But neither he nor his parents have even considered "calling" Christians to pray for him.

That's unfortunate because healing prayer should be a normal part of our ministry and life. So when we're sick, we should call for Christians to pray for us just as naturally as we call for practitioners to treat us.

WHOM WE SHOULD CALL

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

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

But as James makes clear, we aren't limited to Christians with the gift of healing. In verse 14, for instance, he instructs us to call for "*the elders of the church.*" 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-8 restrict elders to people of great spiritual depth and, in my view, that's why James mentions them here. 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. Verse 16 and verse 17 go on to qualify those other Christians. They're the "*righteous*" and that is James' point. If we're sick, we should ask Christians who are spiritually deep, who have a familiar friendship with Jesus, to pray for us.

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 that I've ever known, a righteous man, Ernie Snyder. Ernie prayed and asked God to heal him and he did. Aaron is not brain damaged today.

NOT EVERYONE IS HEALED

We now know, in general at least, what sick people should do. They should ask the righteous to pray for them. That doesn't mean though that they will always be healed if they do. We know from Scripture itself and our own personal experience that not everyone who is prayed for to be healed is healed. The fact is that many are not.

Before he died in 1997, John Wimber had the most credible and effective healing ministry that I've ever known. But as he himself stated in his book Power Healing, some of the people that he prayed for weren't healed, including his close friend David Watson. David had 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 answer his prayer 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."*

That illustrates two things. First, God doesn't heal everyone that righteous people pray for. 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.

Now, we can never know for sure why God does or doesn't heal a person. James does reveal, however, three elements that are essential to successful healing prayer. Let's take a look at all three of those.

FAITH IN JESUS

The first element is found in verse 15. Notice what kind of prayer restores the sick. It's prayer offered *"in faith."* Those two qualifying words teach that successful healing prayer requires faith. Faith is the medium through which God releases his healing power. Almost all divine healing is a consequence of someone's faith in Jesus. By faith in Jesus, I mean the confidence and belief 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 for healing. 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 part of the body that needed healing. Anyway, successful healing prayer usually requires that someone have it - the faith that Jesus can and will heal.

I do want to point something out about that. 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 keep on loving God and trusting their bodily existence to Him.

So that's the first element that's essential to successful healing prayer. Someone has to have faith in Jesus. Someone has to believe that He can and will heal. If we don't believe that, we need to study the healings that Jesus performed in the gospels and read books like Power Healing, asking the Holy Spirit for the gift of faith as we do.

COMMITMENT TO JESUS

The second element that's essential to successful healing prayer is commitment to Jesus.

One of the most fascinating things about James 5 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. We can infer, of course, that they repented of those sins. Verse 16 then links confession of sins with healing prayer. The confessing and the praying go together.

Those verses imply one of the most important truths about healing that we'll ever learn. God normally does not touch people physically without touching them spiritually. Oswald Chambers made that very point in one of his books and he was right. That means if people want God to heal them physically but not spiritually, He usually won't.

In his autobiography Surprised by Joy, C.S. Lewis tells about his mother being stricken with cancer. With childlike faith, he prayed that God would heal her. He didn't though and she died. Reflecting on his prayer, Lewis says that it was utterly irreligious, in this way. He wanted God to come, heal his mother, and then go away. He writes: *"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. They want Him to come, heal them, and leave them alone like they were before. They want Him to heal their body but not run

their life. 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 Jesus. They need to ask Him to come, heal them, and stay. They must want Him to run their life as well as heal their body.

BOLDNESS IN PRAYER

There's a third element that's essential to successful healing prayer. It's found in verses 17-18. It's boldness in prayer. The Greek words that my NASB translates "earnestly" suggest boldness, 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 heard a pastor pray and ask God to heal a sick person "*if it's your will.*" We shouldn't pray like. 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 prayers 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 like Elijah prayed for drought and rain, boldly, and so should we.

Those then are the three elements that are essential to successful healing prayer – faith in Jesus, commitment to Jesus, and boldness in prayer.

CONCLUSION

There's a lot more to be learned about healing prayer but what James teaches here is a good start. I close this morning just as I opened – with the question that James asks. Is anyone among you sick? If you are, you now know what to do. Call on Christians to pray.