

Prayer, Healing, *and* Restoration



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *James 5:13–20; 1 John 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:54; Heb. 12:12, 13; John 8:43–45; Prov. 10:12.*

Memory Text: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (*James 5:16, NASB*).

People are fascinated by the miraculous and the magical. They often are drawn to such things as spectacles or matters of curiosity and nothing more. So, when Jesus was asked to perform a miracle merely for entertainment (*Luke 23:8, 9*) or as a sign of His Messiahship (*Matt. 12:38–41*) or even to satisfy a legitimate need of His own (*Matt. 4:2–4*), He refused. The Spirit, by which Jesus taught authoritatively and effected miraculous healings, is not simply a power to be used; we are to be instruments in His hands. God would gladly heal everyone who is sick, but He is interested in a more substantial, lasting healing.

Thus, in this context, we will look at some crucial questions: How do we understand the words in James about the healing of the sick? Is there a relationship between healing and forgiveness in answer to prayer? Elijah is presented as an important model of prayer in a time of widespread apostasy. What can we learn from his life of prayer and his work of calling Israel back to God and true worship?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 20.

The Essential Christian Toolkit

Read James 5:13. What interesting contrast is he presenting here? How do we apply these admonitions to our own experiences?

Though dealing with two different things (suffering, cheerfulness), James links them with prayer and praise: pray when you are suffering, praise when you are cheerful. The two practices are not that different from each other, however, because many biblical psalms of praise are also prayers, and James begins the epistle urging readers to “consider it all joy” when falling into various trials, “knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (*James 1:2, 3, NASB*). The time to pray and the time to praise might be more intertwined than we generally think.

The word for “suffering” in James 5:13 (*NASB*) is from the same root as the word used earlier to refer to the suffering of the prophets (*vs. 10*). It refers to both physical and mental suffering—“first and foremost for the danger and toil of war” (Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 239), but also to exhausting manual labor and costly effort. It is used in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5, too, to describe “the hard apostolic labor that is not deterred by any difficulty or suffering.”—*Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 240. As Christians, we instinctively turn to God when trouble comes. Prayer is especially essential in facing difficulties, but singing or playing sacred music (the word used, *psalletō*, can mean either) is also helpful.

“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 168. How many of us have been depressed or lonely, only to have the words of a hymn come to mind and lift our spirits? There are many among us who are suffering or need encouragement and would be cheered by a visit filled with prayer and song. “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (*Rom. 12:15, NKJV*). It may lift our spirits, too, as nothing else can.

The book of Psalms especially is a treasure house of prayers and songs that can provide inspiration, encouragement, and direction when we do not know where to turn for help.

We all know how suffering can draw us closer to the Lord and how it can drive us to prayer. What, though, are the spiritual dangers that come when things are going well for us? Why, especially in those times, is praise so important? What does it help us never to forget?

Prayer for the Sick

Read James 5:14, 15. What are the essential elements James prescribes for anointing the sick, and what important spiritual components are found in these texts?

The fact that the sick person calls for the elders of the church to come and anoint him or her “with oil in the name of the Lord” and pray expresses the spiritual desire of the individual and the collective conviction that divine intervention is needed for healing (*Mark 6:13*). The reference to the forgiveness of sins shows that God will not, by means of a ritual, restore a person physically who does not also desire spiritual healing. “To those who desire prayer for their restoration to health, it should be made plain that the violation of God’s law, either natural or spiritual, is sin, and that in order for them to receive His blessing, sin must be confessed and forsaken.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 228.

The request for divine intervention and the summoning of the elders of the church suggest that the illness is incapacitating and, perhaps, also too urgent to be done in connection with a regular church gathering. Two different Greek words are used for the sick here: the first (*astheneō* in verse 14) is also used of Dorcas who “became sick and died” (*Acts 9:37, NKJV*); the second (*kamnō* in verse 15) refers generally to the patient, but it is also used of those who are dying and, in this context, seems to mean someone physically worn out or wasting away. Miraculous healing may happen in answer to “the prayer of faith.” The desire for healing requires full surrender to God’s will, whatever it is (*1 John 5:14*). However, the references to “sav[ing]” and “rais[ing]” the sick (compare “shall save . . . from death” in James 5:20) point unmistakably to the resurrection as representing the only complete healing, the time “when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality” (*1 Cor. 15:54*).

Many of us have known about anointing services, or have even been involved in them, in which the sick are not healed but in fact die. Why, then, is the hope of the resurrection, implied in these texts, our only surety?

Healing for the Soul

More important than the healing of the body is the healing of the soul. Our purpose is not, after all, to make people healthier sinners but to point them to the eternal life found in Jesus. Perhaps that is why the only clear reference to healing in the passage for this week is our memory text in verse 16, which moves away from the hypothetical situations dealt with in verses 13–15. The word for healing in this verse (*iaomai*) can refer to healing that goes beyond the cure of physical illness (see, for example, *Matt. 13:15*). Having already in verse 15 hinted at a broader understanding of healing (the resurrection), James makes the connection between illness and sin, the latter being the root cause of all our problems—not that every illness can be traced back to a particular sin but that sickness and death are the results of us all being sinners.

Read Mark 2:1–12 (compare *Heb. 12:12, 13; 1 Pet. 2:24, 25*). **What kind of healing do these passages describe, and what is the basis of this healing?**

Faith in Jesus brings healing from spiritual weakness and sin. In a sense, every healing Jesus performed was a parable meant to draw people’s attention to their deeper need of salvation. In the case of the paralyzed man in Mark 2, spiritual healing was actually the man’s uppermost concern, which is why Jesus immediately assured him that his sins were forgiven. Yet, “it was not physical restoration he desired so much as relief from the burden of sin. If he could see Jesus, and receive the assurance of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be content to live or die, according to God’s will.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 267. While God’s healers today should employ all available medical means to cure disease, efforts should be made also to heal the whole person, not just for this life but in view of eternity.

Healing includes the healing of relationships, which is why we are exhorted, “confess your sins to one another” (*James 5:16, NRSV*), meaning those we have wronged (*Matt. 18:15, 21, 22*). That is, if you have wronged or offended others, confess to them. Then the blessing of the Lord will rest upon you because the process of confession involves a dying to self, and only through that death to self can Christ be formed within you.

Models of Prayer

Read James 5:17, 18. What do we learn about prayer from Elijah's example? How is it connected with healing, forgiveness, and restoration?

These verses illustrate the assurance given at the end of James 5:16: “the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (*NASB*). Elijah was a “righteous” man and even translated to heaven, but he was not superhuman. He had the same passions and feelings that we have. The fact that God heard his prayer should encourage us that our prayers will be heard too. James says Elijah “prayed earnestly” that it might not rain (a detail not mentioned in the Old Testament), petitioning, apparently, for the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:13–17 (alluded to in James 5:18).

Israel's worship of Baal, the god of storm and lightning, could not go unchallenged on the basis of this prophecy in Deuteronomy. Though we do not know how long Elijah prayed before his prayers were answered, his petitions were based on careful study of, and reflection upon, God's Word in light of his present circumstances. It may be that he quoted Deuteronomy's prophecy as part of his prayer, just as Daniel's prayer for Jerusalem is based on his study of Jeremiah's prophecy (*see Dan. 9:2, 3*). Our prayers, too, will be more effective when they spring from thoughtful consideration of our circumstances in light of God's Word.

The period of no rain lasting three and a half years (also mentioned in Luke 4:25) is a significant time of probation in Scripture (like the prophetic period of “half a week,” or three and a half years of Jesus' ministry in Daniel 9:27, and the “three and a half times” of apostasy in Christianity in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14). At the end of this period, God used Elijah to begin a work of revival and reformation to wake up Israel so that the people would recognize the depths of their apostasy. It was a work that typified both the work John the Baptist would do for first-century Israel in order to prepare the way for Christ's first advent and the work that God has entrusted to His remnant church today to prepare people for the Second Advent (*see Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:13, 14*).

As a church, we are seeking revival and reformation. But it must begin in our own lives, with our own selves, on a personal and daily basis. What choices can only you, yourself, make that will determine the direction and, ultimately, the destiny of your life?

Restoration and Forgiveness

God's Spirit worked through Elijah to restore the relationship between Israel and Himself. But most of Elijah's work was not on Mount Carmel. That was just the beginning! He carried it forward in small villages and homes and in training future spiritual leaders through the schools of the prophets to multiply his work of revival and reform.

Read James 5:19, 20. How does the work described here compare with the work done by Elijah, John the Baptist, and others? See *Luke 1:16, 17; Acts 3:19*.

Often, we forget the tender and patient work done by Elijah year after year. John the Baptist's work, too, focused on leading people back to the truth, inspiring repentance and baptism one person at a time. Jesus described His work in very similar terms: leading people out of error and back to the truth (*see John 8:43–45*).

This hypothetical situation described in James 5:19, 20 uses a conditional construction in Greek, making clear that apostasy is not definitely assumed to exist but is probable. Departure from the truth refers to apostasy not only in doctrine but in lifestyle, for very often the first leads to the second. Doubts begin to form about our beliefs, leading to double-minded behavior, and finally to outright apostasy. Turning back a "sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death" (*James 5:20, literally translated*). Summing up all that has gone before, James appeals for his brothers in the church to do a work similar to that of Elijah in leading people back to God.

This work requires much patience, sympathy, tenderness, and humility: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (*Gal. 6:1, NIV*). The work of Elijah is to turn hearts toward God and His people, not to turn them away. Often the person is well aware of his or her sin and does not need it pointed out. What is needed more is forgiveness modeled by Jesus and provided by His death. Saving souls from death is possible only through the "covering" of sins, by applying the gospel to our lives, and becoming instruments of mercy (*Prov. 10:12*).

Think of someone who has really done wrong and knows it too. What can you do, what can you say, to help draw this person back toward the Lord?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “Prayer for the Sick,” pp. 225–233, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Snares of Satan,” pp. 518–523, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Christ . . . asks us to become one with Him for the saving of humanity. ‘Freely ye have received,’ He says, ‘freely give.’ Matt. 10:8. Sin is the greatest of all evils, and it is ours to pity and help the sinner. There are many who err, and who feel their shame and their folly. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors, until they are driven almost to desperation. These souls we are not to neglect. . . .

“Speak words of faith and courage that will be as a healing balsam to the bruised and wounded one.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 504.

Discussion Questions:

❶ Think of a time when you really made a mess of things, hurting yourself, others, and the Lord by your sin. How much did it mean to you to have people who, although not condoning your actions (and who might have generally and rightly been appalled by them), nevertheless sought to encourage and uplift you? What do you remember most about those experiences, and how can those remembrances help you do the same for someone else who has made big mistakes, as well?

❷ Read James 5:16 prayerfully and carefully. What important spiritual lessons are here for us? What does this tell us about the power of prayer and how important it is for our spiritual lives? Though prayer can and should be a very private matter, in class talk about what prayer does for you, how you have seen prayers answered, and how you have learned to trust the Lord when prayers aren’t answered as you wish. In the end, what would you say is the most important practical benefit that comes from “effectual fervent prayer”?

The Lesson in Brief

► **Key Text:** *James 5:13–16*

► **The Student Will:**

Know: Recognize the importance of prayer and confession in the quest for divine healing and forgiveness.

Feel: Believe that God can restore and heal him or her of any malady, whether physical or spiritual.

Do: Trust completely in Christ as the Great Physician.

► **Learning Outline:**

I. Know: Praying for the Sick

A What steps does James advise taking in our desire to be healed?

B What role do prayer and confession play in our quest for healing?

C Explain what the original meaning of the word *restore* reveals about God as Healer.

II. Feel: A Matter of Timing

A What strength and comfort do you derive from James’s instructions, in a time of sickness, to call in the elders and pray for the afflicted?

B What can you do to keep your faith strong in the face of delayed answers to prayer for healing?

III. Do: Trusting the Great Physician

A What kind of encouragement can you give to someone who is feeling discouraged because his or her prayers for healing seem to go unanswered?

B Suggest meaningful and loving ways to comfort someone who is grieving the loss of a loved one.

► **Summary:** There is nothing that God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.

Learning Cycle

►STEP 1—Motivate

Spotlight on Scripture: *James 5:13–16*

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: **There is nothing that God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.**

Just for Teachers: **Use the activity below to help learners relate to Jesus, not only as their Redeemer but as the Great Physician, who “heals all [their] diseases” (Ps. 103:3, NKJV).**

Opening Activity: Ask a class member or two, whoever feels comfortable enough to share, to briefly relay a time when he or she sought healing from the Lord personally or on behalf of another. What was the nature of the ailment? What was the outcome? Did he or she receive the answer hoped for? If not, how did the class member cope? What questions did it generate? How did the experience strengthen his or her faith? What did it reveal to him or her about Jesus as the Great Physician?

Consider This: Based on the experiences shared and those that we’ve personally experienced, what role does “the prayer of faith” (*vs. 15*), as James puts it, play in healing? Describe what you have learned about this kind of prayer in your own healing journeys. How did it deepen your understanding of Christ’s role as Healer, not only of your sickness but of your sins?

►STEP 2—Explore

Just for Teachers: **Stress the importance of prayer and confession in the quest for divine healing and forgiveness.**

I. Prayer for the Sick (*Review James 5:14–16 with your class.*)

When healing is needed, James advises calling for the elders of the church. “Is anyone among you sick? He should call in the church elders” (*vs. 14, Amplified*). This advice should not be interpreted to mean that James advocates foregoing medical intervention. Rather, it is simply meant to direct our attention to the fact that there is a spiritual dimension to our ailments that

must not be overlooked when healing is sought. Regardless of whatever route we choose to take on our healing journey, we should first seek the counsel and intervention of the Great Physician.

What, though, does James mean by the “sick” among you? It may seem like a fairly obvious question with an equally obvious answer. But a fever is one thing; a congenital defect, present since birth, is another. Does James’s injunction include the healing of such birth defects and longstanding maladies, incurable illnesses, paralysis, et cetera? These are crucial questions. Looking at the origin of the word *sick*, in an attempt to parse out its meaning, is of great benefit in guiding our understanding as we seek for answers. The word *sick*, found in verse 14, comes from the Greek word *astheneo*, which means to be diseased, impotent, sick, or to be made weak. It also carries the meaning of “to be feeble in any sense.”—*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*.

Assertions or promises of this magnitude can be staggering, making many feel skeptical about claiming them. Moreover, if healing is sought but does not occur, the Christian community of faith is at risk for appearing to be a failure, or worse, fraudulent, raising doubts about the genuineness of the petitioner’s faith. All such fears and doubts are not from God.

The bottom line is this: the text covers or offers hope of healing for any ailment or condition. So, then, one may logically ask, why isn’t healing given every time a person seeks God in faith? The short answer is that every prayer for healing is always answered affirmatively—that is, with a Yes. The question is not *if* God will heal the sick but *when* He will do it. So, it is not a matter of twisting God’s arm but one of timing. Let’s explore that concept further.

There are three possible moments of timing for divine healing: (1) instantaneous or immediate (as in the case of the paralytic Jesus healed, in Matthew 9:1–6); (2) gradual (as in the case of Naaman the leper, in 2 Kings 5); and (3) at the resurrection (as in the case of Paul’s “thorn” in the side, or Jacob’s hip (see 2 Cor. 12:7; Gen. 32:25)). Thus, prayers for healing are always answered affirmatively; it is simply a matter of timing as to when. The decision of timing belongs to God alone as to what will bind us closest to Him and will bring the most glory to His name. Living with an ailment this side of heaven may be a special ministry to which God has called certain individuals in order that they may best serve Him and bless others.

Having said that, James outlines five steps that the physically afflicted should follow when divine healing is sought. The sick should (1) call the elders, (2) who “should pray over him, anointing him with oil in the Lord’s name” (*James 5:14, Amplified*). It is worth taking a moment to note that the oil is translated from a word *elaion*, which means olive oil,

a symbol associated with the Holy Spirit. Olive oil was used in the sanctuary service to consecrate and set the priests apart for the service of God. It was used to anoint the kings of Israel. Thus, anointing the sick with oil implies the sick one, even in the midst of affliction, is being set apart so that the Holy Spirit can work. In essence, God is claiming him or her for His service.

We see this truth in the word for anoint itself, *aleiphō*, which is created from two words, one that has the sense of “union” or “unity”—in this sense with God—and the other from a word that means grease or fat, and contains within it the suggestion of something sumptuous—something utterly extravagantly opulent. This denotation suggests that God is generously and extravagantly pouring out His Spirit without measure upon His children in healing and blessing.

Moreover, James exhorts the elders to (3) pray, for it is the “prayer of faith” that “will save him who is sick and the Lord will restore Him” (*James 5:15, Amplified*). There are many modern examples of instantaneous healing. But not all are necessarily genuine. But whether God chooses to heal now or later, the restoration is sure, as an examination of the root word in the Greek illuminates. The word for restore, which is “raise” in the New King James Version, comes from *egeirō*, meaning “to waken, to rouse from disease or death,” literally or figuratively. This word is the same one used in Acts 26:8, where it talks about God raising the dead. Thus, the healing power to remove sickness that James speaks of derives from the same Source as the power used at the resurrection to bring the dead to life again. What a wondrous thought. The connection between healing and the resurrection should cause us to realize there is nothing God cannot heal, transform, undo, bind up, or restore.

Finally, James admonishes the sick to (4) “confess to one another therefore your faults (your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins)” and (5) “pray [also] for one another, that you may be healed and restored” (*James 5:16, Amplified*). The word *therefore* is significant. It signals a kind of causal relationship between confession of sin and healing. After all, sickness is but a bodily manifestation, or symbol, of the devastating ravages of sin. What God can do for the body, He can do for the soul. His gift of physical healing is meant to be an outward manifestation of His longing to heal us inwardly from all our sins.

Consider This: What steps does James advise taking when one is sick? What does it mean to be restored? What does the original meaning of the word reveal about God’s intention and power to heal? What hope does that give us? What is the relationship between confession and healing? Why is that a vital part of the healing process? Discuss the role of timing in healing and the

importance that it plays in the exercise of faith and our understanding of God's will.

►STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Help class members to apply to their everyday life experiences James's advice about how to seek divine healing.

Application Questions:

❶ Recall a time when you petitioned God for healing in behalf of another or for yourself. What was your mind-set: Desperation? Fear? Anger? Anxiety? How do the steps outlined by James help to prepare the sick and their intercessors to remain strong in faith and trust, regardless of the outcome? What strength and comfort do you derive from James's instruction to call in the elders, confess one's sins, and pray for the sick?

❷ What would you say to someone who prayed for a loved one who is ill and is discouraged because he or she has gotten worse or has been laid to rest? Using James's words as a guide, what kind of encouragement can you give without crossing the line from faith over into presumption?

►STEP 4—Create

Just for Teachers: James exhorts us to sing in the midst of our joy (*James 5:13*). Song is a way of drawing us closer to the great Joy-Giver and serves as a potent reminder of the Source of all joy.

Activity: To close, pick a favorite hymn or song and sing it together. If there is time, sing two or three. Plan, as a class, to visit a nursing home, a hospice patient, someone bedridden with illness, or a shut-in, and share these songs of joy.