

James Praying: Healing Prayer

“And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up.” In the book of James we have instruction for how the church should pray for the healing of its members. Whether James was written by James, son of Alphaeus, one of the apostles who was martyred around 44AD (as Calvin thought), or by James, the brother of Jesus, and one of the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (see the Apostle Paul’s reference to James the brother of Jesus, Galatians 1:19 and 2:9), or some other James, in this letter we are taken back to the very early days of the Christian church and, specifically in the passage before us, of the church’s practice of healing prayer.

In James instruction on healing prayer we see the view of the integration of *the physical and spiritual realms*. James counsels those who are suffering to pray (5:13). Those who are cheerful, he counsels to sing praise (5:13). And if there is anyone among them sick, he says “let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up” (5:14-15). Furthermore, James holds to the interplay of spiritual and physical health. He continues, “And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed” (5:15-16).

The book of James – and the Bible – fully affirms the reality of physical sickness and disease. But it also holds, a second affirmation: that our spiritual condition does affect our physical health, and that an important way to address our physical sickness, suffering and even disease is through anointing with oil and prayer and through the confession and forgiveness of sin.

Is this view of the inter-relatedness of the physical and spiritual realms backwards, primitive, old-fashioned thinking? No! Before he became one of the leading preachers of the 20th century, Dr. Martyn-Lloyd was

rising in fame as a physician treating the rich and famous in London. After spending hours cataloguing the ailments of his patients (“eats too much,” “drinks too much,” etc.) he realized that the root issue for many of them, if not most, was spiritual. He decided to go into ministry over medicine because he wanted to treat the root issue of their sicknesses and disease.

The opening chapters of the Bible teaches that the most basic, root cause of sickness, disease, depression, and all else that ails us in this world is sin. The wages of sin is death. When Jesus came into the world he came to be a healer of every part of the person: physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. Isaiah 53:5 says that “with his wounds we are healed.”

What then are the characteristics of healing prayer?

First, healing prayer is *elder led*. Elders in the church represent the healing authority of Jesus. So elders should be called upon when a person is suffering, sick, diseased, depressed to be prayed over. This does not mean that it is only elders who can pray for the sick; not at all, members of the church family can and should pray as well. But it is to be elder led.

Second, healing prayer is *person-focused prayer*. By this I mean that it is prayer for a particular person. That person is anointed with oil. The elder(s) and others members of the church gather around that person and they pray for them specifically, in a focused way. Whatever is ailing the person is brought before God in prayer.

Third, healing prayer *incorporates anointing with oil*. In the Bible oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit; it is also a symbol of God’s anointing and presence. By placing oil on a person we are asking for God to be present in our praying, for His Spirit to powerfully work in that person’s life to bring healing, hope and peace.

Fourth, healing prayer *may include confession of sin*. This is not required, but often times the person prayed for, will share areas in their life that they need to confess sin, areas where they have a barrier or blockage, blind spots or wounds or places in need of Jesus' healing. It is important to take time to let the person being prayed for process these things.

Fifth, healing prayer is *prayer of faith*. We come to God really believing that He exists and that He hears our prayers and that He will answer them. He is our loving Heavenly Father and we trust him and can even wrestle with him for our brother or sister.

Sixth, healing prayer is *earnest prayer by righteous people*. Elijah, James says, is the model for this kind of prayer. He was like us, a mere man, but he prayed fervently and it did not rain for three years on the earth (5:17). Like Elijah, we are not righteous in ourselves, but through Jesus Christ who covers us with His righteousness.

Seventh, and finally, it is the *Lord Jesus who heals*. It is not in the right formula for prayer, or in the right people who are praying, or that they pray with enough faith. No! James says that it is "the Lord" who will raise up the person who is sick" (5:15). Christian prayer for healing does not look to an anointed healer or prophet, it looks to Jesus. Jesus is Lord over heaven and earth, over life and death, and over every sickness. We pray in the "name of the Lord" because it is Jesus' name that is above every name. It is in Jesus we trust. And, ultimately we know that it is up to Jesus whether he heals or does not heal a person. So we come to Him who is our Lord and our healing King asking him for his healing grace, worshipping Him when he heals and worshipping when he chooses not to heal.

Let us grow as a church that practices such healing prayer.

Individual Prayer Guide

Take time this week to read through James. Meditate on all the practical wisdom in the letter James wrote. Ask God your Father to give you faith to embrace the practical teaching of this book. And specifically, when you come to James chapter 5, ask the Holy Spirit to give you a clear and accurate understanding of the integration of the spiritual and physical realms. Consider if there are areas in your life that you would like to ask the elder to pray into.

Community Group Discussion and Prayer

1. What strikes you about healing prayer in James Chapter 5?
2. What are the characteristics of healing prayer in James 5?

Practicing Prayer in your Community Group

Take 20 (or so) minutes to pray. See if there is one person among you who would be willing to be prayed over:

- Ask that person to share specifically the area in their life that they would like to ask for healing prayer in.
 - Anoint them with oil (canola oil will do the trick) and pray for them. It is preferable if an elder is there who can lead prayer; but if an elder is not there to lead the prayer, you can still pray for one another.
3. What was hard/what was good about this time of "healing prayer"?