

THE PRAYER OF FAITH

Certain “self-proclaimed” so-called “faith healers,” say that if you just have enough faith, you will be healed. Of course, supposedly sending in a little “seed money” to their ministry also helps. These people are hucksters, they are false teachers who scam people. But supposedly, they base their ministry on verses like James 5:14-15.

James 5:14–15 (NKJV)

14 Is anyone among you sick? 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.

15 And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

The CONTEXT of what James is saying relates to oppression, persecution, suffering, and struggles that go with it. James 5:13-18 is a passage **about PRAYER!** The ministry of prayer is in view regarding wounded soldiers in the spiritual war. The MAIN emphasis is not on physical restoration but on spiritual restoration. The ministry of prayer is the main idea coupled with spiritual restoration. The words *pray* or *prayer* are found 7 times in James 5:13-18. Prayer is the main subject.

The word “**sick**” can refer to physical sickness and disease but I would argue that doesn't fit the context here. In context, he is speaking about oppression and affliction of the sort that the prophets went through.

The PRIMARY meaning of this word is “**to be weak**”, and the secondary meaning is “**to be needy or poor**”, and its third meaning is “**to be sick**”. I would take it in the PRIMARY sense here.

This word is often used in relation to one's spiritual condition in the sense of being weak, feeble, or depressed. (cf. Rom. 14:1; 2 Cor. 12:10). Therefore, I take it to relate to the idea of spiritual struggles related to persecution and affliction for the faith. The context relates to a wounded soldier in the context of spiritual warfare. The person is down and out emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. I would, therefore, take it in the sense, “**Is anyone among you weak?**” If you suffer then pray (v. 13), but if you are really down and out (“weak”) then you need those who are spiritually strong - you need to call the elders – the strong men of PRAYER!

Note it doesn't say call for the faith healer or the doctor. No, these people need SPIRITUAL help. They need those who are spiritually strong - that is the elders. The ministry of prayer is often forgotten as people now go to

professional experts for counseling and therapy. Yet, this ministry of prayer is powerful and is really what people need for spiritual needs in particular.

The main verb is "**pray over him**". This is the big idea. The elders are the spiritual shepherds, they are not medical doctors. Their real contribution relates to the spiritual needs of God's people.

Anoint with oil

Anointing literally means to rub or massage. It has been understood in various ways.

1) Ceremonial usage where the oil represents the Holy Spirit. However, this particular word is never used this way.

2) Medical usage: It is possible that some could have been physically oppressed and in need of some basic primitive physical treatment that would soothe and comfort.

3) The word is often used **metaphorically** in the sense of refresh, soothe, care for, nurture, and restore. I think this is best here. It is the ministry of restoration with emphasis on the spiritual needs (cf. Ps. 23:5 - "You anoint my head with oil"). It is the imagery of a shepherding ministry that cares for the needs of the sheep.

Also note that a cultural element may be involved here as it was customary to anoint your guest with oil (cf. Luke 7:46) which served as a gesture of love and kindness. This was a common practice that would have brought refreshment, soothing, and encouragement in an often hot and dry land that parched the skin.

In summary: It would seem that PRAYER for spiritual needs coupled with gracious refreshment and encouragement in the physical realm in accordance with the cultural norms of the day is what is in view in James 5. This will lift up and strengthen the broken soldier. In view is a shepherding ministry of tender care - but PRAYER is the main idea that relates to the spiritual needs of the individual.

God does work in accordance with His own will as we pray for physical needs. However, the CONTEXT here, I believe, places the EMPHASIS upon spiritual needs.

When it says, "**the prayer of faith will save the sick**," the word "**save**" means "**restore**". The word sick in James 5:15 is a different word than the

one in James 5:14. It can mean “sick”, but the primary meaning is “**to be weary**” (cf. Rev. 2:3). The only other place it is used in the N.T. is in Hebrews 12:3 and in that context, it refers to spiritual oppression as I believe it also does in James 5:15.

So the idea is that the prayer of faith will restore the weary – the spiritually weary. Those spiritually exhausted, tired, fatigued, and burned-out need prayer. They are too weak to pray themselves, but they need prayer. They need the prayer of the spiritually strong to intercede for them.

Therefore, James does not essentially have physical healing in view, but rather spiritual restoration! The church has almost completely missed this point and, therefore, forsaken this all-important ministry of PRAYER!

Instead of looking to “professional help” and so-called “experts” when it comes to our spiritual well-being, we need to get back to PRAYER!

God answers prayer offered in faith. In answer to this kind of praying “the Lord will raise him up”. The person will be spiritually revived, but he needs to seek it out in conjunction with the prayer of the spiritually strong (the elders). Again, I take it that this is not essentially speaking about physical healing, but rather, the promise is for spiritual restoration.

In view in this passage is the ongoing MINISTRY OF PRAYER related to the local church – the localized family of God. It is a ministry of SPIRITUAL RESTORATION which may or may not have physical ramifications, but the main emphasis is on the spiritual and that is why the spiritual leaders are called in.

Considerations:

1. Remember Job’s friends! They got it wrong (cf. Job. 42:7-8).
2. The emphasis in Scripture is on the spiritual over the physical (cf. 3 Jn. 2).
3. God has not promised good health in the here and now. People get sick for various reasons including the fact that sometimes God allows it for reasons unknown (cf. Ex. 4:11); Satan is behind it (cf. Lk. 13:11-16); it is for God’s glory (cf. Jn. 9:3; 11:4; 21:18-19); it is a matter of discipline (cf. 1 Cor. 11:28-32); a matter of overworking (cf. Phil. 2:26-30), etc. Often, we don’t know the reason that someone is suffering a particular illness or disease (cf. Deut. 29:29). It is part of being a broken person living in a broken world. “Groaning” is biblical! (Rom. 8:23).

4. Our ultimate purpose is to glorify God, whether by life or by death (cf. Phil. 1:20-21). God uses many things in our lives to develop us spiritually (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7; Rom. 8:28-29).
5. God can and does heal in response to prayer – in accordance with His Word and His sovereign will (cf. 1 Jn. 5:14-15).

The “sign-gifts” are gone, but God still works through prayer (cf. James 5:16). The gift of healing is not operative, but the God Who heals is still operative, and He works through PRAYER!