

# The Healing Power of the Prayer of Faith

*Epistle of James*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of James, James 5. We'll be looking at verses 13 to 18 again, particularly verses 14 and 15. This passage is really a call to prayer. James ends his letter, I mean, this is the next to last preaching block, verses 13 to 18, and the focus is prayer. So as he wraps up his letter, he is calling those to whom he writes to live lives of prayer; that the only way that you can really live out the Gospel, the only way that you really can live what you believe, be doers of the word, is by being people of prayer, by being people who are committed to pray and to pray for one another.

And before we move into the text this morning, I do want to take a couple of minutes, this is just a little side road that's an important side road. James mentioned earlier the importance of our planned giving and we're trying to be wise as we consider the Lord's will for our future. We know we have parking needs. We have needs to expand nurseries now and we want to be wise as we look to the future. So we've been asking you to consider and pray for us and what's happened is we've come up with a pretty good plan that looks like a good sort of two-stage plan, and we presented this at the business meeting, but I'm doing this little condensed excerpt for those of you who weren't at the business meeting just to let you know what's going on. We're thinking about the next stage would be to build some more parking which we clearly need as I look out the window and you can see the cars in the grass, and we would also like to build a building out this way toward Sugarloaf that would replace our modular building, would allow us to stop leasing the modular building and put a permanent building in place. This building would eventually be a sanctuary but in the short run, it would be education space, and we'd use that for the foreseeable, the next few years as we continue to seek the Lord. Eventually we would replace the modular building after this building is out there, we would put a new permanent building out there that would be even more education space and that would turn into our sanctuary.

Well, to do that, we'd have to raise, the estimates are like 1.1-1.5 million dollars to do this project. Well, we don't know if the Lord is going to have us do that or not and one of the ways that we can, though, begin to plan well for that is to ask you, "Hey, as you pray about this, what is the Lord leading you to give?" And as James mentioned, we're doing this anonymously. We believe that's biblical, especially as we've been preaching through James, we saw that planning needs to be balanced by awareness that all of our plans are

tentative. And so you may feel like you're going to give X number of dollars per year for the next three years but if the Lord doesn't provide that, if you have some financial issues come up in your family, some medical issues, or job changes, you can't foresee that. So we're not going to hold you to a commitment and say each month, "Hey, where is your...?" We're not even going to know what you committed at all because the commitments are anonymous, but we're going to add up the total and then that will give us an idea, "Okay, we think we're going to raise this amount of money over three years." Are we even thinking that that's a realistic option? And if it is, we'll kind of continue to plan toward that and we'll wait until we get money in before we do it but that helps us know are we even thinking on the right track.

Basically there are few passages just to help you think about this, you might make note of and I'm going to read them quickly, we're not going to turn to them, Luke 14:28-30, Jesus in teaching about what it means to be a follower of Christ says, "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'" That's not the main point of that passage he's talking about discipleship, but as a way of illustrating how you need to count the cost before you follow Christ, he says, "Everybody knows that you don't start a building project unless you know you're going to have the money." And so it's just wise to plan and to understand that as best you can determine.

Another passage, though, James 4:13-16 I alluded to a moment ago, "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.' Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.' But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil." So the plan of giving is if the Lord wills, this is what I plan to give, but if he doesn't, of course, I'm not going to be able to do that.

Then the last passage, a couple of verses in Proverbs 16, verse 1 and verse 9. "The plans of the heart belong to man, But the answer of the tongue is from the LORD. The mind of man plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps." So biblically we are supposed to plan but we know that our plans are tentative. Only the purposes of God stand forever.

So we want to hit that balance of being biblical in the way we approach this. That's where our heart is and we're just asking you to pray with us and to ask the Lord. You may not have any that you can give right now above and beyond your regular giving, and that's perfectly fine. That's between you and the Lord. All of us just need to go to the Lord and pray that God will show us as a church what he wants for us to do, and then individually how he wants us as families and individuals to be a part of that.

One other thing I want just to announce. It's been announced a couple of times to help us as well, we feel like it's an appropriate time for us to pray as a church and we're asking

you to join us in a day of prayer and fasting from Tuesday, March 26, to Wednesday, March 27. We're asking everyone in the church to in some way if you're able, to fast with us. If you're able to fast food, that's great. Well, great in a manner of speaking. It's great because, you know, for the benefit spiritually. But if you're not able to, you can fast anything that you want to. You can be like Daniel, in one of his fasts, he fasted just tasty food and just ate bread and water for a period of time. If you're not able physically to fast, you need to make sure medically that you can do that. There are other options. Or you can fast pleasant activities that you normally take part in, and the important thing about prayer and fasting is you're devoting time to prayer. It's amazing how much your schedule frees up when you're not eating. You just suddenly gained quite a bit of time just by not eating, right? And that's the idea. And hunger also makes you earnest, makes you, you can turn that into spiritual hunger.

So we just ask you to join us in that. We're going to have a prayer meeting on Tuesday night to begin the prayer and fasting. So you may want to eat dinner before you come, and at 7 o'clock we're going to pray, and then the following night, Wednesday night, church is a different schedule. Instead of like normal having dinner at 5:45, we're going to have dinner at 7, we're going to have prayer meeting at 6. So we're going to pray from 6 to 7 and then go over and break the fast together and just have an opportunity to really seek the Lord together and not just, again, we're not just talking about the building fund, remember our main point we spent the first eight weeks of this year talking about is we're not building buildings, physical buildings when we come together, we are building a spiritual building which is the body of Christ. It's building one another to be more like Jesus. It's building each other to grow up into his corporate likeness as we learn to love one another, serve one another. That's what we're building. Physical buildings are just a vehicle that can help us accomplish the real goal and the Lord knows what he wants us to do.

So with that said, that is just all by way of introduction. Now we're going to move into the message. So James 5:13 to 18. We're going to look at verses 14 and 15 as our focus this morning and I think we'll be looking at this title for two Sundays, today and next Sunday, Lord willing, "The Healing Power," the title of the message is, "The Healing Power of the Prayer of Faith." The healing power of the prayer of faith. We said last time that James's focus in verses 13 to 18, these six verses is prayer, and particularly the power of prayer, and we're going to look this morning at verses 14 and 15 and look at the specific power of the prayer of faith, and so the title is the healing power of the prayer of faith.

This is, I mentioned last time also a very controversial passage in the church, a number of different issues come from this passage, but one in particular I mentioned last time is expressed in this question: does this text teach, does this passage teach that it is God's will to heal all Christians from their physical illnesses if they offer the prayer of faith? There are some people who would argue that it does, that this teaches that all Christians who have, who call for the elders of the church and who pray in faith will be healed. Now the reason that that is particularly a somewhat popular view is that it's easy to misread this passage to say exactly that. It looks like at first glance it might say that. That's why

it's so important to know how to interpret the Bible accurately and handle the word accurately because you have to read, anything someone says, no matter whether you're reading the Bible or you're reading a book, you read it in context, and when you read it carefully in context, context bleeds meaning and it helps you understand a particular sentence or a particular paragraph in light of the broader context. What has this person been saying? Therefore I know what he means in this particular sentence or these two, three or four sentences because I understand the fuller context. We're going to see that it does not teach that God wills for every Christian to be healed of every physical illness if they just have enough faith or they prayed a prayer of faith. This is really about spiritual healing. This is the healing power of the prayer of faith for spiritual healing.

Now, I want to say it doesn't mean, I'm not saying that God does not heal physical illness even through this prayer that we are going to look at, the prayer of faith. He does occasionally do that and we should, it's fine for us to seek that. But what I'm saying is what this passage is talking about is physical healing with a little "h," and spiritual healing with a capital "H"; that what James's purpose is to call his, the believers he's writing to from his pastoral burden, to spiritual healing, and he's confident God will always grant that when you come to him that way, and that's what really matters. That's what of eternal significance. Physical healing, though not unimportant, it's important, but it's not primary. It's not eternal.

So that just gives you an idea of where we're going but that's that question what is this text teaching about healing, I think it's teaching spiritual healing is the main focus. Now let's read it together, James 5:13,

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. 16 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. 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. 18 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we ask now as we come to Your word that You would open the eyes of our hearts, give us ears to hear, let us see, let us hear and understand and, Lord, through these things teach us to pray, teach us to pray with faith the way James is talking about, teach us to be people like Elijah, more than that, teach us to pray like our Lord Jesus and, Father, be glorified in each heart we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The healing power of the prayer of faith, and I mentioned the importance of context. It's easy to see if you just look at verses 14 and 15 that, and if I just had those verses and it's all I had, you know, about healing, I would be inclined to possibly conclude, likely conclude that it is God's will to heal all illness. Why? Because look at what he says in just those two verses, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church," is anyone sick, then do this, call for the elders, "and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will," do three things, it will "restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." Three verbs that are promised the power of God will be unleashed and it is saying the power of God is going to be unleashed. In fact, I think the passage, we can get so caught up in saying what this doesn't say that we miss what it says. This is a call to prayer. This is a call to open our eyes that the eyes of our hearts might be enlightened to know, like Paul says in Ephesians, what is the hope of his calling, what is the greatness of his power toward us who believe, and that that power is accessed and unleashed through prayer.

It really is calling us to see the power of prayer. That's why he brings up the amazing analogy of Elijah. After he makes this amazing statement in verse 16, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much," that's a really rich statement and, "Let me illustrate it for you, look at Elijah. Here was a man who prayed and he prayed it wouldn't rain and it did not rain in the land of Israel for three and half years, then he prayed again and the sky opened up and poured forth rain." That is a man who could pray to effect. His prayers were answered. The reason James brings that is to say, "Pray like this because your prayers will be answered."

Now that said, what is he talking about? He's not talking primarily about physical healing, he's talking about spiritual healing. How do you know that? Look at the context. We noted last time when we were considering what does it mean, how are you supposed to pray when you're suffering, and we looked back at James 1 at the way he begins his letter, verses 2 to 4 of James 1. He knows the people he's writing to are suffering. They were Jewish believers in the middle of the first century who have basically by trusting Christ been disowned by their families, they've experienced tremendous persecution that drove them out of Jerusalem and Judea, they fled to various parts of the Eastern Roman Empire, and James is writing to them wherever they are in his encyclical letter to these different Jewish congregations to exhort them to faithfulness. He knows that the weight of the suffering that they're under is great but he does not preach to them like modern day, American, triumphalist preachers: name it, claim it; health and wealth prosperity kinds of preachers. He doesn't sound like them. When you read him in context, that's not what he's saying. He's not saying if you just believe it enough, God will heal you. He's not saying that of your physical, every physical malady. He's not saying that God just wants you to have a wonderful life and claim it. He's not saying that. He's saying God wants you to have every spiritual blessing, yes, but a wonderful life is not here at all when you read it carefully.

I mean, look what he says, James 1:2, "Consider it all joy my brethren when you would counter various trials." Now if it was a name it, claim it, if James was a name it, claim it

preacher, he would say this, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials because God is going to make you victorious over every trial. You're going to say boo to the trial and the trial is going to run away. You're going to have a disease and it's going to go away because God takes it away from you." No, what does he say? "Consider it all joy, my brethren, not because you're going to have this amazing deliverance in the natural realm, consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance, and endurance has its perfect result so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." Endurance means you may remain under the trial, the heavy weight of the circumstantial difficulty in your life is weighing upon you and as you remain under it, your character is being forged. Rejoice in that.

Don't ask God to be, I mean, he doesn't say don't ask God to remove it and, listen, hear me clearly, it's appropriate to ask God to remove it. How do I know that? Well, because we see the examples in the Scriptures. We see someone as great as the Apostle Paul who knew the benefit of suffering ask the Lord to remove his thorn in the flesh. He didn't ask him once, he asked him three times but what did the Lord Jesus say to him? "No, I'm not going to remove it." Did Paul not have enough faith? No, Paul had all the faith he needed, the Lord Jesus said, "It's not My will to remove that from you because My strength is made perfect in weakness. My grace is sufficient for you to bear up under this trial." And Paul then became victorious not by getting rid of the thorn in the flesh but by triumphing through Christ in the midst of the pain and suffering. That's the way that God gives victory, not by removing it, that's his normal way. And someone even more amazing, the Lord Jesus Christ before the cross, he asked the Father in his perfect humanity, perfectly sinless life, he asked the Father three times if he would remove this cup from him.

So it's okay to pray and ask the Lord and genuinely ask him. I mean, it's fine to say that and it's just right, in a sense, that we would, none of us should be masochistic. We're not advocating that. We're not saying there is no benefit in making yourself suffer. Don't ask for suffering. Now sometimes when you ask for things like patience, indirectly you're asking for suffering but I wouldn't say ask for suffering. "Lord, teach me patience in the gentlest way possible," and the Lord is good to do it in the gentlest way possible. He always does it exactly the right way. But the Lord Jesus asked the Father three times to remove it but what did he always end his prayer with? "Yet not My will but Thy will be done." That is the prayer of faith, the prayer that is submitted to God.

So you can ask him to remove it and it's appropriate and we should pray for physical healings and that God would be glorified in doing an amazing physical healing in a situation, that's appropriate to pray for, but as we pray and as we consider, the Lord will lead us often to understand just like, you know, we see it so many times, the Lord, he's saying no to our prayer for physical healing but he will always say yes to your prayer for spiritual healing, grace and strength to become more like Jesus. When you're asking him to do that, you have that which you ask, and what we need to do is be more bold in asking for that part. I think we should be more bold in praying for healing, physical healing too. I mean, we should pray, "Lord, You can do it." But what I think we need to ramp up our prayer for that because sometimes we as, especially Reformed people, we can become

used to just whatever happens happens because we know God is sovereign, and you can take truth out of balance, and we should pray for physical healing and I think we should ramp up our intensity there a little bit, but it's like it needs to ramp up like this but our prayer for spiritual blessing needs to ramp up like this, and we need to realize that we have not because we ask not. Many of us are suffering what he's talking about here which I'm going to explain a little more, it's not the physical illness that's the main focus that James is burdened about, we're suffering because we will not humble ourselves and ask others to pray for us. We're not praying enough ourselves and we're not asking for people to pray. He's talking about people who find themselves spiritually afflicted, where they are experiencing spiritual sickness, as it were, sometimes it started with a physical problem, sometimes it started with just other, you know, sin problem, but it's become a spiritual affliction and they are becoming helpless where they almost can't pray for themselves and he says then ask for the elders to come and pray for you.

Now with that kind of an introduction, let's move into the points I want to consider. I think there are four points in the passage and we'll probably cover two today, and the first point in this morning's message is the nature, we're talking about the prayer of faith, the healing power of the prayer of faith, the nature of the need for the prayer of faith. The nature of the need for the prayer of faith and I'm going to argue that it is spiritual, that that's the real basic essential need for the prayer of faith, it's spiritual more than physical.

Now how do we get that looking at James 5:13 to 18, verses 14 and 15 particularly? First of all, two keywords in the passage that's really one keyword in English but there are two Greek words behind it. It's the word "sick." In verse 14, "Is anyone among you sick?" Verse 15, "and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick." Twice we have the English word "sick," but when we look at the Greek word behind it, this is actually, there's more here than meets the eye. The word "sick," it translates a Greek word which literally means or the etymology of the word, it means "to be without strength." It's the alpha privative in front of a verb, "sineo," which means "to be strong," *astheneo*, *asthenos*, and so the idea is to be strong, to have strength, you put the alpha privative in front of it and it means to not have strength, to not be strong. This word, in fact, is translated about, it occurs about 85 times in all of its various forms in the New Testament and more than 50 times it's translated with words like "weakness, weak," 30 some odd it's translated "sickness, illness."

So it is, it's within the semantic range of meaning of this Greek word to translate it "sickness or sick." It's appropriate but there are a number of words that James could have chosen for "sick" and one word in particular is more specific just to talk about the illness. Like, you know, say the word "virus" or, you know, because "sick" even in English means different things, "Man, I am sick of pizza." I'm not sick of pizza but I have been sick of pizza at times in my life. You know, what does that mean? I've had too much. I just don't want even to think about pizza, right? Well, the word "sick" can mean different things too and this particular word can mean different things in Greek. It tends, though, to emphasize when you're talking about sickness or illness, it emphasizes more the weakness that comes from being sick. You get sick and you become weak. You get a

virus, you become weak. You get a disease and you become weak. You're no longer able to do.

"Is anyone among you sick?" It could be translated "weak," and I think that's the idea, especially when you look at the second word translated "sick" in verse 15. That word is a word which normally speaks of working to the point of exhaustion. When he says in verse 15, "the Lord will restore the one who is sick," that verb there, "who is sick," is a word which means "is exhausted, is worn out," and they translate it "sick" because it can be but it's even less in the semantic range of that word, but because of the context it seems like they're talking about someone who sick and so they translate it "sick," but it could be "exhausted."

Well, and I think in a sense James has in mind sometimes you can be weak and exhausted from physical illness, battling that, dealing with that, dealing with the day-to-day troubles of that but he's talking about more the spiritual focus, the spiritual issues at play when you are weak. I think he's speaking of those who are spiritually because they may be going through various different kinds of circumstances, they are spiritually weak and exhausted. They have no spiritual energy. They are incapacitated, sidelined. And one of the ways I think we think of this is to understand that part of our problem when we come to the New Testament, the Old Testament as well, is that we don't realize how much the way we read something is affected by all of our, you know, our programming from the world, how do we think about ourselves. So many things, so much bad thinking. We come into the world disposed to sin. We come into the world opposed to God, disconnected from God, not believing in the Lord, and the world system is lying to us every day and sin in us wants to rebel against God, and so we formulate all these different thought processes and we are very very self-focused. Well, James and the New Testament would call us to understand what it means to be a Christian in a very unselfish way.

When you think about this, this is the way James himself thinks of himself, interesting word, we've talked about it before in the exposition of the book but James how he describes himself way back in the beginning in verse 1 of chapter 1, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." That word in Greek, "bond-servant," actually would be better translated "slave." It is the Greek word "doulos" which is a person, a slave, someone who is owned by another, not a servant that has given themselves into, I mean, it doesn't really cover that. It's just you are a slave. You have no will of your own, no rights of your own, and so your master calls the shots in your life. James is saying, "I am a bond-servant or a slave of God and of Jesus Christ. That's how I understand my identity."

Now think about that and how that informs the way that you look at everything, how it ought to inform the way we look at everything. Does the master in the morning, is it appropriate for the master to ask the slave, "Listen, what would you like to do today?" Or as he says, you know, the master says to the slave, "This is what we're going to do today. I need you to work on this project. I need you to accomplish this." And the slave says, "No, I don't want to do that. I want to do something else and I really get upset when you



try to tell me what to do. Or I thought we were going to be doing this other thing and you changed up on me." No, the slave accepts what his master tells him to do and the slave, if things change suddenly going one way because the master says go this way, and the master says go another way, a slave, we are supposed to be of Jesus Christ, someone, a Master so wonderful, so wise, so loving, so good, who has poured out his blood for us, shown his love for us, can we not trust that he knows best. We live our lives submitted to him. I mean, Luke 9 and actually 14 was what I read earlier, you know, you have to see if you have enough money to complete the tower. He talks about the cost of discipleship in chapter 14 but also in chapter 9 and he says, "Listen, what it means to be a follower of Jesus is you disown yourself, you deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Me. If you love your life, you will lose it. If you lose your life for My sake, you will find it." That the very essence of true conversion is a surrender of your will to Christ.

So he sets the agenda. Now if he sets the agenda and he really does and he really does have the authority, how much right do I have to quibble with what he's doing with my life? Now the wonderful thing is he also calls us his sons and he lets us talk to him about it. He doesn't just call us slaves, he calls us sons, but at times he emphasizes the fact, I mean, Jesus says, "Listen, if you want to be My disciple, you have to surrender everything and follow Me." So now think about that, you're a servant, your master has work for you to do. "If any among you is weak, he must call for the elders of the church and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is worn out from the labor." Your master has work for you but you are now weak and worn out from the battle. You're like a soldier who is unable to fight. You're like a laborer who has no energy to carry out the work. If you find yourself in that state, if you find yourself spiritually depleted, overwrought, unable, then what are you to do? Call for the elders of the church because what are they going to do? When they come and pray for you, they're going to pray for you and the prayer of faith, you having the faith to call for them, them having the faith to pray for you, then God is going to answer that prayer with spiritual power. In fact, even the three things he says about what the promise is, I think speak to the spiritual nature of the malady. I mean, the remedy is spiritual because the malady is spiritual.

He says, listen, those three verbs in verse 15, "will restore, will raise up, will be forgiven," first of all, the verb "will restore" translated by the ESV and the King James as "will save," it's actually the word "sozo" that normally is translated "save" in the New Testament. It speaks of salvation. The word means "to rescue from peril." So he's saying that the prayer of faith is to rescue from danger, will rescue you from danger, will rescue you from destruction. The picture is someone who may be having a physical illness that started the process but their spiritual life is being impacted in such a destructive way that they are having no energy for God, they are no longer serving the Lord and they are turning away from God and they feel that and they feel in danger, they can't even pray like they need to and so they call out for help to the elders of the church.

And it is carried even further by the second verb, the Lord will "raise him up." The idea of this second verb, it's often, actually the most common natural translation of this word "raise up" is "to get up, wake up." That's the way this verb actually normally means rise up from sleep. The first five or six times it's used in the New Testament are when Joseph

is asleep and he has a dream, remember he has a dream, the angel speaks to him and he wakes up. That's this verb. And then a couple more times an angel appears to him and says, "Get up," remember? After the baby is born in Bethlehem they're in the house and the angel says, "Get up and get moving because there are people seeking the child's life. Go to Egypt." And it says Joseph got up, the same verb, and then later in Egypt he has another dream and the angel says, "Get up and go back, the people that were after the child are dead," and it says Joseph got up. So it means wake up.

So the Lord will raise him up, the Lord will wake him up and he will be restored spiritually to being alert and awake again. I think this speaks a couple of different passages in the New Testament that talk about the kind of stupor that can happen spiritually to believers. One is Ephesians 5:11 to 14, "Do not participate," this is Ephesians 5:11, the Apostle Paul says, "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; for it is disgraceful even to speak of the things which are done by them in secret. But all things become visible when they are exposed by the light, for everything that becomes visible is light. For this reason it says, Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." Wake up, you who profess to be a believer. Wake up.

The same thing is in Romans 13:11-14, the same kind of theme. There Paul in writing to the Romans, he says, "Do this, knowing the time, that it is already the hour for you to awaken from sleep; for now salvation is nearer to us than when we believed. The night is almost gone, and the day is near. Therefore let us lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." So this idea of rise up, wake up. So I think he's picturing a situation where someone is under spiritual affliction to the point where they are feeling the pressure, they sense that it's so great that their spiritual vitality is drained.

So he says when you find yourself heading in that direction, call for prayer and then the last thing especially shows it's spiritual, "and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." Now sometimes the circumstances have weighed in upon you. You didn't start the problem, the problem started maybe as a physical malady. You're not responsible for physical maladies, you get some kind of disease and the disease, though, the way of living with it, how hard it is, just the difficulty, the discouragement, and you take your eyes off of Christ and you're not enduring as you need to and the next thing you know you're becoming more and more focused on yourself, less and less connected to Christ, less and less connected spiritually to the body, and over time you find yourself becoming more and more dulled to the things of God, more and more spiritually asleep. He says the remedy is call for prayer.

So these were the circumstances, I mean, this is the nature of the need is spiritual. The nature of the need is spiritual and I think one other thing that helps me to come to this conclusion is we're going to talk about this more specifically time but the anointing with oil, when they pray for him, anointing him with oil. There are so many different

controversies in this passage but I think what's going on here is the anointing with oil is, one of the main or the most important spiritual thing in the Old Testament that was done or the most important reason for anointing with oil in the Old Testament was to set apart people for ministry and the work of God. You anointed the priest, you anointed the prophet, you anointed the king. People were anointed and the anointing of oil symbolized the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit of God would be upon them, and so I think the anointing with oil for the believer is, "Lord, in this person's life we want You to use them to the maximum for Your glory. They are in danger of being sidelined or they already are, they feel like they are on the sideline. Get them back off the sideline." We anointed them and, "Lord, we're praying that You will now empower them with Your Spirit to live for Your glory."

So the basic need, the nature of the need for the prayer of faith is spiritual, spiritual sickness. Physical sickness is often there and may be one of the means through which the spiritual sickness has happened which brings us to the second point, the circumstances. I said the nature of the need for the prayer of faith, let's call the second point actually the occasion of the need for the prayer of faith, and by occasion I'm talking about circumstances. The occasion of the need for the prayer of faith. How does this happen? When does this happen where someone is spiritually sick? We've been talking about it a little bit but let's talk about it a little more specifically here and I want to talk about a couple of ways that you see this happen.

First is in the case of physical illness. Now think about what happens when you're hurting. You know, sometimes you just get a bad case of the flu and isn't it amazing how, boy, everything is altered by a bad case of the flu. Your whole life just suddenly, you may have had all these things that had to get done and suddenly you don't really care because all you can think about is how bad you're hurting, maybe you have a stomach flu and that's just misery, isn't it? I mean, you have a fever and you ache, you're sick at your stomach. There are moments where you can find yourself, I know I've felt bad enough where I've wanted to die. I mean, you just had that thought, this is so miserable for so many hours, when is the nausea going to stop? I almost wish I could just die. And then people that have prolonged things like that, especially like chemotherapy and the pain of chemotherapy. Radiation can be painful. And so living with long-term pain and suffering and often nausea and things like that that go with that, agonizing, physically so demanding, emotionally so costly, and when you're in those circumstances, it's very easy, when you are in pain, just think about this, how easy when in pain just to think about yourself. How hard is it to think about other people when you are hurting badly? I mean, at some point it becomes almost impossible, right? You're hurting so bad that I cannot possibly think about you. My brain is telling me, "Pain! Pain! Pain! Pain! Pain!"

Okay, so you have a circumstance sometimes like that but then that's not normal that pain is at that kind of 10 level normally or 12 out of 10 sometimes, but not for extended periods of time and there are ebbs and flows, but if you're living with extended periods of pain that even like that low-level, medium, moderate level, occasionally high-level but it's continual, how easy it is to become embittered and just consistently self-focused, how easy it is to start grumbling and complaining against God, isn't it? "Lord, why? Why are

You doing this?" How easy it is for people around the person that are hurting sometimes to have even more trouble with that than the person that's hurting. "Lord, why wouldn't this be me? Why are You letting my loved one suffer like that?" Especially for the person that so much of their energy is just dealing with the pain, dealing with the circumstances, the potential possibilities, and what happens is as we turn in upon ourselves, we become less and less useful to our Master, less and less able to really serve him, more and more embittered, more and more distant, and so I think one of the applications of this is when you're going to go through some kind of major physical thing or you're going through it, you don't have to wait until you get to the end of the road, you can do some preemptive calling in of the elders because this is something that's going to happen. If you're going to have major surgery or you're going to have some physical issue that you know is going to be hard, to call them in and say, and part of the focus is of this prayer is to help this, "Lord, we ask You for relief." It's okay to ask for relief, I said last week, I know, it's not just that you, you don't just ask for relief. No, you can ask for it but you surrender, you say, "But Your will be done." That's not my main purpose because what we want to do if we are really going to be faithful servants is we ought to want more than anything else in this temporary, this temporary life, this short breath that we live on this earth compared with eternity of bliss in the presence of God, this short life to be used for the maximum glory to our Savior, then we ask for relief but we really ask most of all for your will to be done.

So what happens is the Lord knows how weak we are and he knows when we're under this kind of affliction, we can't do it on our own and part of it is to be humble and say, "Help me. I need help. Pray for me." You say, "That's weakness." Yes, it is but it's actually just the truth. The person who doesn't say pray for me, it's not weakness, it's stupidity, it's pride. So pray for me. Then we come alongside and through prayer he is saying that when we pray for one another powerful things happen. The Lord does incredible works. He delivers this person from something that could be tremendously perilous to them.

Now what he's saying when the prayer offered in faith will restore the one, will save the one who is sick, will save the one who is worn out, there is a danger when someone gets to that point of them becoming so self-focused that they turn away from God and what happens, Hebrews 3:12 and 13 says, that the deceitfulness of sin hardens them to the Gospel and they fall away from the living God. That means they were never truly saved if they really ultimately fall away, but the author of Hebrews tells us that and he says, "Encourage one another day after day while it is still called today lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." And so what's happening is the same kind of thing here, when someone's about to undergo affliction or they are undergoing affliction, they find themselves feeling this coldness, they call for prayer and the elders go and they pray and the Lord saves them. He wakes them up. He raises them up. Spiritually it's a wake-up call and they are able to see what they weren't able to see before because we prayed. You have not because you ask not.

And if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. The assurance of forgiveness comes through this prayer. There has been embitterness, there has been selfishness, there

has been self-focus and I've been turning in upon myself and I sense that and I feel like that I don't know how to get out. Well, call for prayer and through that prayer these things will happen, and then you've got to keep walking it out by faith, of course. It's not going to be your whole life is going to change in one moment but something decisive happens when this is the focus. When you really in faith call out for prayer and when the elders pray in faith, when other Christians lift you up in faith, something happens. That's the whole point. That's why James says, verse 16, after he says, look at these three things happen, I mean, they're going to be saved. The one who is sick is going to be saved in this sense from this potential devastation, they are going to be awakened up, they're going to have assurance of forgiveness, then he says, "Therefore, hey guys, listen, if this is true of prayer in these difficult situations, therefore all of you continually confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. If it works like that in the intense moments, it works like that all the time."

So this is a part of the Christian life and we should understand that we are so frail and so weak that we shouldn't be so proud that we don't think, we couldn't, we wouldn't get there if we were suffering, but for the grace of God, there but for the grace of God go I. You see, only the grace of God that keeps us from becoming embittered and selfish and spiritually washed out but it all turns when the person does what the command is. There's a command in the text, "Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call." It turns at that point, when the person who is weak and worn out calls, and then there's a second command, then the elders of the church are to go and to pray over him, anointing him, setting him apart unto the Lord for special blessing, and now re-engagement, re-empowerment for ministry that he might walk the course that God has for him in power, spiritual power. He might get back on the team, get back on the field.

Now second, the physical application I think is the main one he's going at here, that it happens this way but it can also just happen through just spiritual, let's say spiritual decline, just general spiritual decline, sin. You can find yourself caught in sin and what happens is you turn it upon yourself the same way and sin becomes more powerful and you become less and less effective, and I think this has application there. Are you now weak? Are you now worn out in a battle with this sin? Are you overcome by this sin? In a parallel passage is Galatians 6:1, "If any of you is overtaken in offense, if one among you is overtaken in offense, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. You who are spiritual, the leadership, the spiritual people, other believers who are spiritual and who are walking with the Lord, restore that person." It means anyone who is willing to ask the Lord for help, go help them.

So we can find ourselves in this by letting ourselves go down a path of sin. It's so easy to just take one little small step and another little small step, whatever it is, whatever the sin is, and before long you've gone so far down the path you can't see the way back. What do you do? You call for help. You ask people to help you and it turns at that point when you call. You will have not if you ask not. So these circumstances, physical sickness, the second one I was talking about just in these last few moments would be, be spiritual, sickness or weakness, weariness from the battle with sin. A person has been sinning, they're asleep, they're in danger. In the same way if you allow yourself to go down the

path of sin, you become in danger exactly the way Hebrews 3:12 and 13 is talking about, hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, in danger of falling away from the living God. Don't rest, call out for help, call out for prayer, and people praying for you will make the difference and you, then, doing this in faith, you really want God to work.

In just the context, he's just wanting us to know, "Listen," he's basically saying, "You guys, we guys have no idea how much difference prayer makes." That's what he's saying and I think this is especially important for people who have a high view of the sovereignty of God. I had a professor in seminary, a wonderful, Doug Kelly, I mentioned him a number of times before in sermons, fantastic professor. He wrote a book that was really good for a Calvinist to write, "If God already knows, why pray?" I mean, think about that, it's a very good question, isn't it? God already knows what he's going to do, why do I need to pray? Well, the whole point of the book is because God commanded you to pray and God's going to use your prayers and without your prayers some things are not going to happen. How does that work with the sovereignty of God? It just does. We can't measure it. This is what James is wanting to say, he is wanting us to enlarge our understanding of the power of prayer. He's wanting us to marvel that God would let you and me, dust of the earth, sinners saved by grace, who were conceived in sin, brought forth in iniquity, that he would let us in our uttering prayers to him bring, move heaven and earth by his will, by his power, for his glory, but yet through our prayers.

Pray for one another. The healing power of the prayer of faith is so far beyond what we can imagine and if we believe that, we will start praying for one another for purity and victory and the glory of Christ. It doesn't mean that you're not going to still have to struggle and battle. No, that doesn't, that's not what, but you will have breakthroughs and clarity of understanding in the word and new energy to study the word yourself, to pray more yourself, and you've got to keep at it and you have to keep praying. The Lord's wisdom in making everything by prayer is our God doesn't just want to give us holiness, he wants to draw us into relationship and the more we know we need him, the more we know we've got to be seeking his face all the time. It's wonderful to serve a King like that, a Master like that.

Let's pray.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for, Lord, Your ways. Your ways are not our ways, Your thoughts are not our thoughts. They are as high as the heavens are above the earth, so are Your ways above our ways and Your thoughts above our thoughts. Lord, You've told us in that same passage just before that to call upon the Lord while He is near, let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord for He will have compassion on him, and to our God for He will abundantly pardon. For My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts. We wouldn't do that, Lord, but You are so gracious and so kind that the person who has been hardening themselves against You, that if they will just return to You, seek You, You will abundantly pardon. What an awesome God You are. Lord, help us help one another to do just that. Grant us grace. Grant grace to those here today who need to call out for help and then, Lord, show Yourself strong as we who are weak, all of us are weak, every one*

*of us is weak, as You strengthen our faith and help us to lay hold of Your throne through prayer and unleash Your spiritual power for Your glory, and as You do, let us take no human glory in that at all. No, not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but to Your name be glory, and we thank You that You are more than able to do above and beyond all that we ask or imagine according to Your mighty power which is at work in us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.*