

SERMON TITLE: Prayer and Healing

SCRIPTURE: James 5:13-18

DATE: January 22, 2023

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## *SERIES SUMMARY*

In Scripture, we find the life of faith is often a difficult journey. But true faith in Jesus will show itself in tough times and display the reality of Jesus to a watching world. In the same way, we're called to give voice to our words and action to what we believe. This is how our faith can make a transformative difference in our lives and the lives of others. On this side of eternity, a faith not applied is worthless and will make no difference. The book of James regularly asks us to put our faith into action so others can witness the reality of Jesus in our lives. As we turn towards Christ, our faith journey will be purposeful, fruitful, and sustain us through any difficulty we face.

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## *SERMON SUMMARY*

James has been saying, in the midst of pain and suffering, put your faith into action. Now he says, put knees to your faith. When you are in trouble, pray. When you are cheerful, sing praises. When you are sick, you *might* want to call for the elders. When you live in authentic Christian community, you experience the healing power of grace in all its fullness.

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## *SERMON SCREENSHOTS & KEY POINTS*

One of the most confusing things that Christians deal with is the whole matter of prayer and healing. My grandmother got breast cancer, people prayed for her, she had surgery and follow-up radiation treatments, and she was healed. The cancer never came back, and she died of old age. My mother got breast cancer, people prayed for her, she had surgery and follow-up treatments, the cancer came back several times, and she died of cancer. Why? What happened? Why is one person prayed for and they are healed, and another person prayed for, and they're not? The unsettling, maddening reality of divine healing is this—sometimes God heals, sometimes He does not, and He never bothers to tell us why. And when we come to the passage of Scripture we're going to look at today, things can become even more confusing.

Read James 5:13-18—This passage raises a lot of questions, and to answer them, we need to do some serious Bible study. We need to look at nearly every phrase in the passage because nearly every phrase can be and has been misinterpreted and misapplied, and that's caused a lot of confusion in the church regarding divine healing. First, we need to understand a basic principle of Bible study. To understand a text, you must understand the text in context. A Bible verse doesn't mean what you think it means or what you want it to mean. A Bible verse can never mean what it never meant. And when we rip verses out of context, we are ignoring what God was saying to the first people to whom it was written. To understand any passage of Scripture, we have to understand the text in context. So, what's the context for James 5:13-18? Let's start with the book as a whole. James is writing to scattered, persecuted Jewish believers who have put their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. He's encouraging them to put their faith into action in the midst of any and every trial they face. And essentially, in this passage, James is saying, "Put feet to your faith by putting knees to your faith." Clearly, this passage is about prayer, and James talks about three different kinds of prayer.

- **Personal Prayer (5:13)** — "When you are in trouble, pray. So, what do we pray for when we're in trouble? We can pray for relief. We can pray for God to remove the trouble. But we can and should pray for wisdom (cf 1:5). We are to ask God to give us the wisdom we need to be patient and to endure the trial so that we grow in our faith—so that we grow to be more like Jesus. Now, when you pray for relief and relief doesn't come, ask God for wisdom and pray for God to do whatever He needs to do in you to make you more like Jesus. He goes on to say, "When you are cheerful, sing praises." Sing praise to God when you see Him working in your life—either answering your prayers for relief or answering your prayers by giving you wisdom and patient endurance in the midst of hard times.
- **Elder Prayer (5:14-15, 17-18)** — "When you are sick, you may need to call for the elders." This part of the passage is very important to understand because here's where all those phrases I mentioned earlier come into play. First, James implies that the sick person is too weak and weary to come to a church meeting, so the elders go to them. Second, the context—the verses before and after this passage (James 5:15-16 and 19-20)—suggests that the sickness James is talking about here has come as the result of sin. There are other places in the NT

where physical illness and premature death may be God's discipline for unconfessed/undealt with sin in the life of a believer (cf Acts 5; 1 Cor 11:30). Most definitely, all sickness is not the result of sin, but some sickness may be the result of sin. Verse 16 shows us that, in some cases, confessing your sin, and praying for healing, does result in being healed. There seem to be two conditions for healing when God chooses to heal. First, prayer must be offered "in the name of the Lord," and second, prayer must be "offered in faith." So first, "praying in the name of the Lord" is not simply using that phrase as if it's some kind of formula or magical incantation. "Prayer in the name of the Lord" is prayer in keeping with how Jesus did life and ministry. Jesus did not heal people simply because He could. He did not initiate healing. The Father did, and He only did what He saw the Father doing. "Praying in the name of Jesus" means praying and looking for where God is already working so we can join Him in His work. Second, "prayer offered in faith" is not about how much faith you have. It's not about you working hard to "believe" that God will give you what you want and not doubting. No, praying in faith is very different from what many of us think. Prayer offered "in the name of the Lord" is prayer that is keeping with how God is already working. The "prayer of faith" is prayer that is in keeping with what God has revealed He will do. Elijah's story of praying for it not to rain and then praying for it to rain for three and a half years perfectly fits with these two points. In this story, God disciplines His people because of their sin in turning away from Him. God tells Elijah He will send no rain. Then, the people repent. They confess their sin and turn back to God. And God tells Elijah to pray for rain, and it rains. The point is—Elijah prayed in response to God's revealed Word. He prayed in faith that God, who was working to change the hearts of His people, would do what He said He would do—praying to stop the rain, then praying for God to send the rain. This means we need to always be praying, "God show me where and how You are working in this situation (this sickness), and God, show me what you want to do in this situation." BTW—anointing with oil most likely has a symbolic meaning. Oil symbolized the Holy Spirit's presence and work in our lives as people set apart for God. *Personal prayer, elder prayer.*

- **Community Prayer (5:16)** — When you put your faith into action in authentic community, you will experience the healing power of grace in all its fullness. Praying with two or three people who you are close with—two or three people who will seek God's will with you regarding the troubles in which you find yourself—two or three people you trust enough to share your struggles with—James says praying with those kinds of friends is powerfully effective. That's why I said earlier, "You may want to call the elders" because all you really need, might just be a small group of close friends to pray with you and for you.

James says to us: "In the midst of pain and suffering—when things don't go like you had hoped—when you are treated unfairly—when you're hurting, and you are tempted to doubt God's goodness—put feet to your faith by putting knees to your faith—SO—When you are in trouble, pray. When you are cheerful, sing praises. When you are sick, you might want to call for the elders to pray for you. But when you live in authentic Christian community with a small group of people you trust and who trust you—you will experience God's grace and healing in very real, tangible, powerful ways.

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### COMMUNITY GROUP QUESTIONS

Begin with—"Would some of you share your experiences of praying for someone and seeing them healed, but then praying for someone else, and they were not healed? How did that make you feel? What is the most confusing, disappointing thing about having very different outcomes when praying for healing?"

Have someone read James 5:13-18

- Then ask: How does this passage fit with the rest of the book of James? How does this passage help us "put our faith into action" in the midst of trials and troubles, sickness and suffering?
- There are a lot of things that need explaining in this passage, especially when it comes to phrases like, "praying in the name of the Lord," "the prayer offered in faith." Talk about these phrases and the way Charlie explained them. How would it sound to pray in the way He explained?
- What would you say to someone who says to you, "You could be healed if you just had enough faith"?
- How does Elijah's story about praying for rain (1 Kings 17-18) fit with the point James is trying to make in this passage? Why is this story a better fit with James' point than Elijah healing the widow's son in 1 Kings 17:7ff?
- Read and talk about James 5:16—How can your community group take a step toward becoming the kind of small group that has a close prayer connection with each other?

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The following resources have been a great help to us in preparing messages for this sermon series: *The Letter of James (NICNT)*, by Scot McKnight; *James (ZECNT)*, by Craig Blomberg Mariam J. Kovalishyn; *The Epistle of James*, by Peter Lange & J.J. Van Oosterzee; *The Letter of James*, by Douglas Moo. Also, I (Charlie) have benefited from the teachings of Tim Keller, Andy Stanley, Tim Mackie and the Bible Project, and others whom I will credit during my messages. I have adapted and borrowed insights and illustrations from these men and incorporated them into the messages in this series.