



LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

HEALING – *James 5:13-20*

1 Introduction The Epistle of James is a very practical book. James writes as a pastor and addresses a number of different topics, often quite briefly. He wants believers consistently to live out the faith they proclaim and to apply God's wisdom to difficulties in the Christian life. He says that any knowledge of God they have must be put into action.

2 A variety of ways of praying How powerful is prayer? When do you pray? James says that ***we should pray in any and every situation.***

- When *in trouble*, pray (**v.13a**) – probably meaning personal prayer, bringing to God our requests for strength to persevere through all our difficulties.
- When *happy*, as we give God thanks, what better way of praising God than by singing (**v.13b**).
- When *ill*, seek the prayer of others: perhaps the leaders of the church (**v.14b**) whose ministry may include anointing with oil (a symbol of God's goodness being brought into the situation), or perhaps the whole congregation – "pray for each other" (**v.16**).
- When *sinful*, confess your sins (**v.16**). James includes the possibility, which sounds rather uncomfortable to us, that we might confess our sins to each other.

3 Three things that never vary

- ***God is concerned for the healing of the whole person.*** James speaks of both healing and forgiveness. When Jesus healed a paralysed man (**Mark 2:1-12**), he both forgave him his sins and brought physical healing. NB James only says, "If the person has sinned . . ." and Jesus says that there is not always a connection between sin and physical illness (**John 9:1-3**). The healing – the

wholeness – that Jesus brings involves every aspect of the person. We might note that the verb translated ‘save’ in **v.15** is often used for the healing of the body as well as for the salvation of the soul (see **Mark 5:23; Luke 7:50; 8:36**). Health, as the Bible understands it, is the complete well-being of the whole person.

- ***It is all to do with faith.*** “The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well” (**v.15**). “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (**v.16**). James cites Elijah as a great example of this (**v.17f**). Faith – faith that God has the power to heal and that his will is perfect – is an absolutely vital aspect of our praying for healing. But that does not mean that, if we can muster up enough faith, we can make God heal; our prayers will be answered, but not necessarily in the way we hoped. Remember Paul’s thorn in the flesh (**2 Cor 12:7-10**): God did not take his affliction away, but he answered his prayer in a different way by giving him the strength to persevere.
- ***It is God who does the healing.*** When someone is anointed with oil, it is done *in the name of the Lord* (**v.14**). Oil is often seen in the OT as setting apart someone for the Lord’s special attention or bringing them before the Lord for his merciful consideration. “*The Lord will raise them up*” (**v.15**). However the healing ministry is exercised, it is not the person praying but God who does the healing.

4 **What is ‘the prayer of faith’ (v.15)?** There is much discussion about this, but a retired pastor in South Wales, Eryl Davies, recently wrote to me of his understanding, which I commend to you.

I understand it as the prayer of faith which the Lord gives sovereignly as He pleases and when. It is not a matter of ourselves convincing ourselves that God can do something. You can believe that and still not have the prayer of faith. Our son Marc was born in answer to a prayer of faith based on Ps 113:9. I had experienced a lovely time in prayer worshipping the Lord and unexpectedly v.9 was brought to my attention powerfully and I began to thank the Lord for answering for a child. I wrote the

date by the verse and the Lord gave us Marc, then Ann, when the medics had said that it was impossible and that we should adopt.

With regards to a man Gwyn who had terminal cancer originally having spread from the eye, we met as officers each Saturday evening for prayer. They were precious times of waiting on the Lord. We were very close to the Lord on occasions, and felt we had an intimate audience with the Lord, so we were encouraged. After about 3 months, our praying changed – without any prior agreement – into prayer for revival and blessing whatever the Lord did, and the assurance was given to Gwyn and myself that he was going to go to glory and be with Christ ‘which is far better’. Yes, it was a huge loss for us but the Lord was gracious.

Healing within Christian Faith and Experience Steve Clark

Did you know that God is supernatural? What He does goes beyond the natural. We are not talking about being superstitious but about allowing God to be all He is and not limiting our expectations, as if He were some benign philosophy. He is ‘the God of our salvation’. Wonderfully, the root of the word ‘salvation’ means to ‘release’. Jesus teaches salvation and does salvation throughout his ministry, as he releases people from **all** that imprisons them – whether it be physical, emotional or spiritual blindness or even death! Salvation is obviously about release from sin that imprisons and ruins relationships with God, other people or our world, but God created us with physical bodies and Jesus shows that He cares and brings release to them too.

We need to acknowledge that people get sick and die; even Paul left Trophimus sick in Miletus (**2Tim 4:20**), but I say with absolute conviction, after 15 years of praying for people full time (in Christian healing centres), that prayer transforms situations, people’s lives and even ourselves as we pray. I long for faith to be raised in all of us so that we pray for the sick. Having prayed, we look for what God might be doing and change our prayer constantly to follow the whispers of His will.

Testimony about prayer recently given in church by Jenny Bramford

My husband, Ian, was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer just before Christmas last year. The oncologist advised us that it was aggressive and incurable. Signs of cancer were already present in the liver too. Ian was placed on chemotherapy along with immunotherapy every three weeks. When the chemotherapy cycle was completed, a scan was done on 19th April. When the oncologist called with the results, he described them as “impressive” as the tumour had begun to shrink, down from 7.6mm to 1.1mm. The liver was also clearer. Ian will continue with the immunotherapy for some time and so we pray for further improvement.

From the outset our reaction was to take it to Our Lord. We prayed, our family and friends prayed, the church family prayed and we were made aware of how much love and support was being directed towards us. Throughout the last four months we have felt carried and held up in prayer. God is working with us and amongst us and prayer is our connection to His Love and healing powers.

For homegroups

1. In what circumstances are you likely to pray? In what circumstances are you most likely to fail to pray? How big is your vision for prayer? How can you expand it?
2. Think about our church. What aspects of prayer that James highlights here feature most – and least – often? Is the balance helpful? How could our church express the healing ministry described in **v.14-16**?
3. Some medical practices provide counselling facilities as well as medication for patients. How far does this passage encourage that kind of service, and how could Christians become more involved in it?
4. Can you tell of occasions when prayers for healing have been answered? Can you tell of occasions when prayers for healing were, as far as you could see, unanswered? Could you make sense of what happened, or were you left bewildered by the experience?
5. What can we learn from **2Cor 12:7-10**, where healing wasn't granted in the way Paul prayed for it?
6. Summarise what these verses have taught you about prayer.