



## Faith and Prayer

James 5:12-19 |

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### SUMMARY

Our passage this week contains three phrases which require further explanation: 1) anointing with oil (what's that all about?); 2) the prayer of faith (what's that?); 3) confession of sin in connection with healing prayer. This can be both a difficult teaching to understand and receive, so as you read along. Read slowly. Make sure that you're understanding what is being said and what is NOT being said.

- 1. Anointing with oil.** This one is probably the easiest to explain. Anointing with oil in James' culture was often medicinal (oil was used as part of many medicines), but here its use is symbolic of setting the person aside for special attention in prayer.
- 2. The Prayer of Faith.** Some people see this as simply saying that everyone present (esp. the person being anointed with oil) must have faith and not doubt. But this simply cannot be the case, because in the Bible faith is not a lack of doubts. It is saying to Christ, "I believe; help my unbelief." Faith is coming to Christ *even with* your doubts. As Tim Keller once put it, coming to Christ even with your doubts, "takes more faith than working yourself into a lather."

The Prayer of Faith is coming to the Lord in dependence upon him, asking him very specifically, very directly: "Lord, this is what we are asking for. We ask for this even amidst our uncertainties. We don't know what you're doing here, but we do trust you, we know you're good, so we're coming to you with this thing that we don't know what do do with."

- 3. The Confession of Sins.** Now this might be the most interesting thing that James says here. It's also the most wildly misused thing that James says here, and often to the spiritual abuse of Christian brothers and sisters. James says in verse 16 "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed."

It's right there, but it's not comfortable, because what it can sound like is, "If you're sick, then the reason you're sick is because you're sinning." **THAT IS NOT at all what is being said!** As Christians, we should be making sure that those who are coming for healing prayer are **(1)** receiving specific, fervent prayer for healing; **(2)** getting the best medical care; **(3)** receiving spiritual shepherding and gospel counsel to examine his/her heart to look for and confess sins to renew their relationship with God. **Why?**

**First**, because we are created body and soul, sometimes our bodies react to what's happening in our "inmost being," and sometimes sin (worry, fear, anger) cause physical illness or aggravates it. My worry can cause very real headaches. My anxiety and fear can

cause very real (and painful) ulcers. When I am angry, I feel it in my gut. Ask a Christian doctor who has a little theological training and they'll tell you, "Brain-body illnesses are not imaginary illnesses. They're real illnesses, but they're aggravated and many times caused by spiritual issues." So sometimes praying for spiritual healing and restoration actually helps with physical healing.

**Second**, because we are created body and soul, sometimes our physical discomfort reveals areas of our spiritual life that need spiritual and emotional healing. **What do I mean?** When you get sick, and I've seen this in both those who are temporarily sick and those with terminal illness, you feel weak, you are weak, you feel vulnerable in a way you haven't before, you're no longer in control like you thought you were. And this is the place where God meets you with a spiritual breakthrough to bring spiritual healing.

**Tim Keller puts it this way**, *"Sometimes not until you get sick do you realize what a fragile, vulnerable, dependent, contingent creature you really are. It's when you can hardly get out of bed sometimes that you actually have a true picture of your real spiritual condition. We are utterly dependent on him....very often when you get sick it humbles you into the dust. Very often just because you're out of the busyness, when he makes you to lie down (Ps. 23), you start to be able to look at your life in ways you couldn't before. Sickness is very humbling. Sickness knocks you on down. So often you will be able to see sins, you'll be able to admit flaws you couldn't any other time..."*

*The Bible is saying here you must always, always do them together. You must always use physical sickness as a time for spiritual renewal. You must always make sure you're working on spiritual healing as well as physical healing at the very same time. **Always**"*

As I've mentioned, I seen this in my own life. I've seen it with family members for whom we've specifically and earnestly prayed that they would be physical healed, and the Lord gave spiritual healing, and brought them home to himself. **We don't get to choose the result of our prayer.** *This is, I believe, one of the hardest parts about walking with God: trusting this he is good, that his ways are truly wise, and that in his steadfast lovingkindness he is really working all things together for our good and salvation (Romans 8:28).*

**So here is the thing I hold onto (and I pray it would help you as well):**

*Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*

*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together [even me, in my hurt, disappointment, and pain. even there **He** is holding all things together]. And he is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he is the head.*

*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven [in sickness and in health, though death could never part us because] He made peace by the blood of his cross." (Colossians 1:15-20).*

**And so we confess:** I believe that this is true. Lord...help my unbelief. **Amen and Amen.**

**Take some time as a group to read James 5:12-19. Then ask these questions:**

1. What stood out to you as you read today?
2. What point does James seem to be making?
3. How does this portion of Scripture connect to what came before? How does it connect to what comes after?
4. What didn't make sense? What do you still wonder about?
5. What is hardest about trusting God for physical and spiritual healing?