

Prayer, Healing, and Restoration (Renewal)



SABBATH—DECEMBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: James 5:13–20; 1 John 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:54; Hebrews 12:12, 13; John 8:43–45; Proverbs 10:12.

MEMORY VERSE: “So admit to one another that you have sinned. Pray for one another so that you might be healed. The prayer of a godly person is powerful. It makes things happen” (James 5:16, NlrV).

PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN MIRACLES. They often are pulled into such things out of curiosity and nothing more. So, when people asked Jesus to do a miracle just for fun (Luke 23:8, 9) or as a sign of His Messiahship (Matthew 12:38–41) or even to satisfy His own needs (Matthew 4:2–4), He refused. Jesus taught and did miraculous healings through the Spirit. But the Spirit is not simply a power to be used. We are to be tools in *His* hands. God would gladly heal everyone who is sick. But He is interested in giving us deeper, spiritual healing that lasts a lifetime.

So, with this in mind, we will look at some important questions. How do we understand the words in James about the healing of the sick? Is there a relationship between healing and forgiveness in answer to prayer? Elijah is presented as an important model (example) of prayer in a time of widespread backsliding. What can we learn from Elijah's life of prayer and his work of calling Israel back to God and true worship?

THE IMPORTANT CHRISTIAN TOOLKIT (James 5:13)

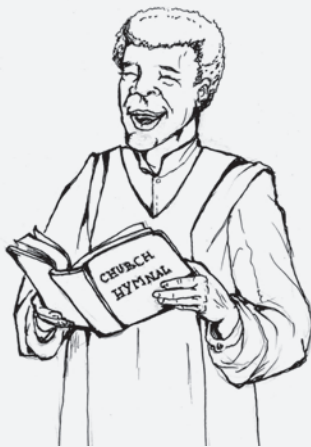
Read James 5:13. What interesting comparison is James showing here? How do we use these teachings in our own experiences?

James is dealing with two different things—suffering; cheerfulness. But he connects them with prayer and praise. Pray when you are suffering. Praise when you are cheerful. The two practices are not much different from each other. For example, many Bible psalms of praise are also prayers. For this reason James begins the letter encouraging readers to “think of it as pure joy” when falling into different sorts of trials. “You will face all kinds of trouble. When you do, think of it as pure joy” (James 1:2, 3, NIV). The time to pray and the time to praise might be more closely tied together than we generally think.

The word for “suffering” in James 5:13 (NASB) is from the same root as the word used earlier to mean the suffering of the prophets (special messengers) (James 5:10). It speaks of both physical and mental suffering. But it also means very hard, tiring, and demanding work. It is used in 2 Timothy 2:9 and 4:5, too, to describe “the hard work of Christians which is not prevented by any difficulty or suffering.”—Adapted from Ceslas Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*, volume 2, page 240. As Christians, we naturally turn to God when trouble comes. Prayer is very important when facing difficulties. But singing or playing holy music (the word used, *psalletō*, can mean either) is also helpful.

“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer. Indeed, many a song is prayer.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 168. How many of us have been depressed or lonely only to have the words of a hymn come to mind and lift our spirits? There are many among us who are suffering or need encouragement and would be cheered by a visit filled with prayer and song. “Be joyful with those who are joyful. Be sad with those who are sad” (Romans 12:15, NIV). It may lift our spirits, too, better than anything else can.

We all know how suffering can bring us closer to the Lord and how it can drive us to prayer. But what are the spiritual dangers that come when things are going well for us? Why is praise so important in those times? What does it help us never to forget?



“Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer.”

PRAYER FOR THE SICK (James 5:14, 15)

Read James 5:14, 15. What is the important advice James gives for anointing (putting oil on) the sick? And what important spiritual components (parts) are found in these verses?

Suppose the sick person calls for the elders of the church to come and anoint him or her “with oil in the name of the Lord” and pray. This shows that the person and his or her church group desire God to step in and heal (Mark 6:13). The forgiveness of sins shows that God will not heal a person physically who does not also desire spiritual healing. “Suppose people desire prayer to be healed? Then they should understand that breaking God’s law, either natural or spiritual, is sin. So if they are to receive His blessing, sin must be confessed and forsaken.” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Ministry [Work Done for God] of Healing*, page 228.

Asking for God’s help and calling the elders of the church suggest that the illness is very serious and, perhaps, also too important to be done in a regular church gathering. Two different Greek words are used for the sick here. The first (*astheneō* in verse 14) is also used in Dorcas’s case. Dorcas “became sick and died” (Acts 9:37, NKJV). The second (*kamnō* in verse 15) talks about the patient. But it is also used of those who are dying. It also seems to mean someone physically worn out or wasting away. Miraculous healing may happen in answer to “the prayer of faith.” The desire for healing requires full surrender to God’s will (1 John 5:14), which may, or may not, include healing. But, the wording to save and raise the sick (compare¹ “shall save . . . from death” in James 5:20) means the resurrection (return to life), which shows complete healing. “The bodies we now have are weak and can die. But they will be changed into bodies that are eternal” (1 Corinthians 15:54, CEV).

Many of us have known about anointing services. Or we have even been involved in these services, in which the sick are not healed but die, instead. So, why is the resurrection (return to life from the dead) our best hope?

DEFINITIONS

1. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

HEALING FOR THE SOUL (Mark 2:1–12)



Every healing miracle Jesus did was a parable meant to show the people their deeper need of salvation.



If you have wronged someone, confess to him or her. This shows God's love.

DEFINITIONS

2. parable—a very short story that teaches a lesson or a spiritual truth.

More important than the healing of the body is the healing of the soul. Our purpose is not to make people healthier sinners. But we are to direct them to the eternal life found in Jesus. For this reason, the only clear answer to healing in the verses for this week is our memory verse found in James 5:16. Verse 16 moves away from the questions found in verses 13–15. The word for healing in this verse (*iaomai*) can mean healing that goes beyond the cure of physical illness. (Read, for example, Matthew 13:15.) In verse 15, James hinted at a broader understanding of healing: the resurrection. Then he makes the connection between illness and sin. Sin is the root cause of all our problems. Not every illness can be pointed back to a certain sin. But sickness and death are the results of us all being sinners.

Read Mark 2:1–12 (compare Hebrews 12:12, 13 and 1 Peter 2:24, 25). What kind of healing do these verses describe? And what is the basis of this healing?

Faith in Jesus brings healing from spiritual weakness and sin. In a way, every healing miracle that Jesus did was a parable² meant to bring people's attention to their deeper need of salvation. In the case of the paralyzed man in Mark 2, spiritual healing was really the man's greatest desire. This is why Jesus quickly told him that his sins were forgiven. "The paralytic wanted spiritual healing from sin more than he wanted physical healing. If he could see Jesus, and receive the promise of forgiveness and peace with Heaven, he would be satisfied to live or die, according to God's will."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 267. God's healers today should use all available medical methods to cure disease. But efforts (hard work) should be made also to heal the *whole* person. This should be done not just for this life but in view of eternity.

Healing includes the healing of relationships. This is why James says to "confess your sins to one another" (James 5:16, NRSV). This means to confess to the people to whom we have done wrong (Matthew 18:15, 21, 22). That is, if you have insulted others, confess to them. Then the blessing of the Lord will come upon you because the act of confession involves a dying to self. Only through that death can Christ live in you more completely.

MODELS (EXAMPLES) OF PRAYER (James 5:17, 18)

Read James 5:17, 18. What do we learn about prayer from Elijah's example? How is it connected with healing, forgiveness, and renewal?

These verses show the promise given at the end of James 5:16. "The prayer of a godly [righteous; holy] person is powerful. It makes things happen" (NirV). Elijah was a "righteous" man. He was even translated (taken by God to live in heaven). But he was not superhuman. He had the same emotions and feelings that we have. The fact that God heard his prayer should encourage us that our prayers will be heard too. James says Elijah "prayed earnestly [seriously]" that it might not rain. (This is a detail not mentioned in the Old Testament.) Clearly, he prayed for the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 11:13–17 (spoken of in James 5:18).

Israel's worship of Baal, the god of storms and lightning, could not go unchallenged because of this prophecy (special message from God) in Deuteronomy. We do not know how long Elijah prayed before his prayers were answered. But Elijah's prayers were based on his careful study of God's Word. Our prayers, too, will work better when they come from thoughtful study of God's Word. This study will help us understand and judge our own situations more clearly.

The period of no rain lasting three and a half years (also mentioned in Luke 4:25) is an important time of testing in the Bible. (It is very much like the prophetic period of "half a week," or three and a half years of Jesus' ministry in Daniel 9:27, and the "three and a half times" of backsliding [returning to evil] in Christianity in Daniel 7:25 and Revelation 12:14). At the end of this period, God used Elijah to begin a work of waking up Israel and bringing the people back to God. This would help them to see how deeply they had fallen. It was much the same kind of work that John the Baptist would do for first-century Israel. John the Baptist's work was to prepare the way for Christ's first coming. And the work that God has entrusted to His remnant church today is to prepare people for the Second Coming.

As a church, we are trying to have a rebirth. But it must begin in our own lives, our own selves, on a personal and daily basis. What choices can only you make that will affect your future?

**RESTORATION (RENEWAL) AND FORGIVENESS
(James 5:19, 20)**

God's Spirit worked through Elijah to renew the relationship between Israel and Himself. But most of Elijah's work was not on Mount Carmel. That was just the beginning! To make his work of renewal grow, he carried it forward in small towns and homes and in training future spiritual leaders through the schools of the prophets.

Read James 5:19, 20. How does the work described here compare with the work done by Elijah, John the Baptist, and others? Read Luke 1:16, 17 and Acts 3:19.

Often we forget the gentle and patient work done by Elijah year after year. John the Baptist's work, too, focused on leading people back to the truth. John inspired one person at a time to turn back to God and to be baptized. Jesus, too, led people out of error and back to the truth (read John 8:43–45).

In James 5:19, 20, the use of the Greek language makes it clear that backsliding could happen. Wandering from the truth means backsliding in both doctrine (Bible beliefs) and lifestyle. Very often the first leads to the second. We start to have doubts about our beliefs. Then they lead to double-minded behavior and finally to full backsliding. Turning back a "sinner from the wandering of his way will save his soul from death" (James 5:20, literally translated). So, James is encouraging his brothers in the church to do a work very much the same as that of Elijah in leading people back to God.

This work requires much patience, mercy, gentleness, and humbleness. "Brothers and sisters, what if someone is caught in a sin? Then you who are guided by the Spirit should correct that person. Do it in a gentle way. But be careful. You could be tempted too" (Galatians 6:1, NIV). The work of Elijah is to turn hearts *toward* God and His people, not to turn them away. Often the person knows of his or her sin and does not need to be told about it. What is needed is more of the forgiveness that Jesus showed us through His life and death. Saving souls from death is possible only through the "covering" of sins, by using the gospel in our lives, and becoming tools of mercy (Proverbs 10:12).

Think of someone who has really done wrong and knows it too. What can you do or what can you say to help lead this person back toward the Lord?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “Prayer for the Sick,” pages 225–233, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “Snares of Satan,” pages 518–523, in *The Great Controversy*.

“Christ . . . asks us to become one with Him for saving humans. ‘Freely ye have received,’ He says, ‘freely give.’ Matthew 10:8. Sin is the greatest of all evils. And it is ours to show the sinner mercy and help. There are many who err and who feel their shame and their foolishness. They are hungry for words of encouragement. They look upon their mistakes and errors until they feel helpless. We are not to neglect these souls. . . .

“Speak words of faith and courage that will be a healing medicine to the bruised and wounded heart.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 504.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1 Think of a time when you really made a mess of things. You hurt yourself, others, and the Lord by your sin. How much did it mean to you to have people who did not criticize you but helped you by encouraging and uplifting you? What do you remember most about those experiences? And how can those memories help you do the same for someone else who has made big mistakes too?

2 Read James 5:16 prayerfully and carefully. What important spiritual lessons are here for us? What does this tell us about the power of prayer and how important it is for our spiritual lives? Prayer can and should be a very private matter. But, in class, talk about what prayer does for you and how you have seen prayers answered. Also tell how you have learned to trust the Lord when prayers are not answered as you wish. In the end, what would you say is the most important useful thing that comes from “righteous [holy; unselfish] prayer”?



“Speak words of faith and courage that will be a healing medicine to the bruised and wounded heart.”