

**Practicing This One Thing:
How to Pray for Healing
James 5:13-18**

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a challenge to pray. We can't talk about prayer without including some teaching about praying for healing. Most of our praying has to do with praying for the sick. This seems to be a tangible form of praying for us. The passage in the Bible that deals with this is in James 5.

We are doing things a little bit different this morning, but with good reason. You see, it is always the goal of preaching that there be a point of application. So, we gather, we read and give instruction on God's Word, and we send you off to apply God's Word. This morning, we are going to invite you to immediately apply God's Word. Our approach necessitates that I preach now and we will have a more extended opportunity for worship through singing and praying a little bit later in our service.

Text: Is anyone among you suffering? He should pray. Is anyone cheerful? He should sing praises.¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord.¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The urgent request of a righteous person is very powerful in its effect.¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours; yet he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the land.¹⁸ Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the land produced its fruit.

Introduction: Usually when one deals with this passage, we will focus on the end—praying over the sick person. Actually, there are two issues of equal importance that precede the encouragement to pray over the sick and yet another issue that accompanies and follows the instruction to pray over the sick. So, in order to deal Biblically with this passage, we must seek the instruction of all of these pillars.

If you are suffering, pray!

The word used here for suffering is not a specific word. That is, there is not a specific kind of suffering that is in mind. The same word is used in verse 10 just earlier. This word keeps with the pattern of the whole of the book about a variety of kinds of suffering. One commentator (David Nystrom in the NIV Application Commentary) mentioned how this word was never used in terms of illness. That is instructive in relationship to making a clear distinction with that which is to come in this passage. So, are you suffering? Is there an inner turmoil of any kind going on in your soul? You should pray! How are we to pray?

- With Praise to God for the trial (James 1:2)
- For Personal Growth as a result of the trial (James 1:3-4)
- For the Wisdom of God during the trial(James 1:5)

- With Faith in God for the resolution of the trial (James 1:6)
- With Fervency (James 5:16)
- In Righteousness (James 5:16)

If you are happy, sing!

Next, James asks a second question. “Is anyone cheerful?” He should sing! I have often remarked, “You know, you can observe a lot from up here where I stand each Sunday.” Sometimes I see people mad or sad. Thankfully, a lot of times I see people pretty cheerful. We need that.

The goal of happily singing is not to make others envious, but in the broad sense of corporate worship, we need to know that for some, God is doing some great things. As Christians, that should not produce a spirit of envy, but a spirit of corporate thanksgiving—a spirit of rejoicing with those who are rejoicing.

So, if we are cheerful, we ought to sing!

Earlier this year, I attended the Governor’s Prayer Breakfast. Fred Luter was the speaker, and Ricky and Sharon White Skaggs were the guest musicians. They ended the prayer breakfast with singing “Keep on the Sunny Side of Life.”

There's a dark and a troubled side of life;
 There's a bright and a sunny side, too;
 Tho' we meet with the darkness and strife,
 The sunny side we also may view.

[chorus]
 Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side,
 Keep on the sunny side of life;
 It will help us every day, it will brighten all the way,
 If we keep on the sunny side of life.

Tho' the storm in its fury break today,
 Crushing hopes that we cherished so dear,
 Storm and cloud will in time pass away,
 The sun again will shine bright and clear.

I remember thinking “This is kind of odd”—only in Louisiana would we sing a folk song like that to end a prayer breakfast. The Lord reminded me of that thought this week as I was preparing to preach this sermon. I did a little research on the song. It was written in 1902 for a hymnal. What? So, I read the lyrics looking for why it belonged in a hymnal. My cynicism had caused me to totally miss the last verse.

Let us greet with a song of hope each day,
 Tho' the moments be cloudy or fair;

Let us trust in our Savior always,
Who keepeth everyone in His care.

In just a moment, as we call others who are suffering to pray, we are going to call those who are on the sunny side of life to sing. As we sing, be thankful, because the “sunny side of life moments” come from our Savior.

If you are sick, involve others!

Now, we come to the third section of this passage. You will note that this section is more developed than the previous sections. The passage instructs us to pray very specifically for healing. There is a lot that can be said about this passage, but for the sake of giving some concrete ideas today, allow me to summarize with some Biblical conclusions about healing.

Biblical Conclusions about Healing

1. God is the one who heals, not the prayer or the one who prays.
2. God heals to bring glory to Himself and bring others to Himself.
3. There is a link between prayer and righteousness.
4. You will never figure out why some are healed and some are not!

Sometimes healing takes place in unusual ways. Tony Campolo tells a story about being in a church where he was asked to pray for a man who had cancer. He prayed boldly for the man's healing and that next week he got a telephone call from the man's wife. She said, "You prayed for my husband. He had cancer." Campolo thought when he heard her use the past tense that his cancer had been eradicated! But then she said, "He died." Campolo felt terrible. But she continued, "Don't feel bad. When you saw him he was filled with anger. He knew he was going to be dead in a short period of time, and he hated God. He was 58 years old, and he wanted to see his children and grandchildren grow up. He was angry that this all-powerful God didn't take away his sickness and heal him. He would lie in bed and curse God. The more his anger grew towards God, the more miserable he was to everybody around him. It was an awful thing to be in his presence." But the lady told Campolo, "After you prayed for him, a peace had come over him and a joy had come into him. Tony, the last three days have been the best days of our lives. We've sung. We've laughed. We've read Scripture. We prayed. Oh, they've been wonderful days. And I called to thank you for laying your hands on him and praying for healing." And then she said something incredibly profound. Tony, she said, "He wasn't cured, but he was healed." (Tony Campolo, "Year of Jubilee," Preaching Today Tape #212).

Sometimes, God heals supernaturally. Sometimes God heals through medicine. Sometimes God heals permanently in Heaven.

So, what are we to do? We are to pray! And we are to trust Him!

We are going to do that this morning.

During invitation portion of the service.

If you are sin-sick, ask for forgiveness.

I love the exactness of this text. "And he will be forgiven."