

The Power of Prayer¹

(James 5:13-18)

An Expository Sermon

by David Roper

Christians are not immune to problems. This is obvious from even a superficial reading of the fifth chapter of James. In addition to the normal problems of life, the Christians in his day were cheated by rich land owners (v. 4). They were dragged into court unfairly (v. 6). Problems multiplied. In James 5:7-12, we note that James urged them to be *patient*—to endure, to continue on, not to quit—and to do so without grumbling and complaining. He stressed things they should *not* do: They should not blame their troubles on fellow Christians (v. 9); they should not curse and swear (v. 12). But then the question comes, When we have problems, what *should* we do?

We have so many problems. We try to cope from day to day, but sometimes things build up to where we feel like a human pressure cooker. Something has to give. We feel like we want to cry . . . or scream . . . or hit something. But James says we are to be patient. We are not to vent our feelings on others. So what *can* we do? Are we to just keep all these strong feelings bottled up within us? Or is there a legitimate expression for our emotions? James answers, “Yes, there is.” Our text begins, “Is any among you afflicted? let him *pray* (v. 13; italics mine). Do you have problems? Do not complain, do not curse, but rather *pray*.”

Through the years, scholars have struggled with the main theme of James 5:13-18. The most common question asked is this, “Is James primarily talking about sin or *sickness*?” It is my conviction that, although both sin and sickness are discussed in the section, the topic under discussion is *prayer*. Prayer is mentioned seven times in the passage. I cannot think of a more needful subject or more exciting theme for our next-to-last lesson. The passage reads:

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit (vv. 5:13-18).

As we study this text, I want to emphasize two things: (1) *Whatever* our situation in life, prayer is always appropriate. (2) There is *power* in prayer.

I. PRAY ALL THE TIME (5:13-16a)

One of L. O. Sanderson’s great songs begins:

The world has lost the right of prayer,
And saints have failed to pray;
What loss sustained beyond repair!
How blind of heart are they!

Pray in the Morning,
Pray in the Noontime,
Pray in the Evening,
Pray any time;
Pray when you’re happy,
Pray when in sorrow,
Pray when you’re tempted,
*Pray all the time.*²

When should we pray? First of all James says: PRAY WHEN THERE IS TROUBLE (v. 13a).

Verse 13 begins, “Is any among you afflicted?” “Afflicted” is translated from a term that refers to troubles of all kinds. It is from the same root word as that used in verse 10: “Take, my brethren, the prophets . . . for an example of suffering affliction.” The NIV translates the verse, “Is any one of you in trouble?”

Make a list of problems: There are physical problems—illness, fatigue, and the like. There are psychological problems—turmoil, stress, pressures. There are financial problems—the loss of a job, a cut in pay, inflation, increased ex-

penses. There are family problems—problems in our marriage, problems with our children, problems with our parents. There are problems connected with our jobs—a transfer, a move we do not want to make. There are problems connected with how old we are—youthful temptations, middle-aged disappointment, old-age frustrations. There are spiritual problems—the inability to live right, a guilty conscience, evil accusations, and so on. *All* these problems—and any others—are included in that word translated “affliction.”

Another ingredient is also in the word that needs to be noted. In his book, *Studies in the Epistle of James*, A. T. Robertson notes that “affliction” means, literally, having hard experiences, and [notice this] it refers to *natural depression* as a result of such misfortunes.”³ (Italics mine.) “Depression”—how often do we hear that word today! What a common problem! Is it not true that when we have difficulties, we must not only deal with the problems, but also with our *reaction* to those problems? How frequently we become discouraged, depressed.⁴

When we have these problems, and when they get us down, what should we do? Apparently, some Christians in James’ day complained and cursed. Probably the most common reaction *today* is to worry and fret. On occasion I have seen this sign displayed: “Why Pray When You Can Worry?” The sign is intended as irony, but I wonder if that is not often the way we react to trouble.

James says what we *should* do is *pray*. The phrase translated “let him pray” is in the present tense in the original language, which suggests continuous action. The passage could literally be translated “let him *keep on praying*.”

With various physical problems, there are some medicines we take as needed, while there are some we have to take all the time. As a rule we do not take antibiotics all the time. If an infection is indicated, we go to the doctor, who prescribes what is needed at the moment. On the other hand, if we have diabetes or high blood pressure, we are to take the prescribed medicine all the time, without fail—even when we feel good, even when we think we do not need it.⁵ In this passage, James tells us that prayer is not a prescription to take on special occasions. If we are to combat spiritual disease, if we are to main-

tain good spiritual health, prayer is an “all-the-time” requirement!

Earlier in the book James noted that we never know what tomorrow may bring (4: 14). We need to be ready for anything. To do that, we need something *fixed* in our lives that cannot be moved, regardless of what comes. That “something fixed” is our relationship with God which is kept viable through our prayer life.

Is it not wonderful to realize that we can pray to a God who understands (Hebrews 4:15, 16), a God who listens and loves? The Psalmist said, “God is our refuge and strength, a *very present help* in trouble” (Psalms 46:1; italics mine). He is not an absentee Father who sends a check and says, “Work it out yourself.” He is present; He is near; He helps.

Abraham Lincoln, in the dark hours that faced him, said he turned to God for help because of the realization that he had no other to whom he could turn. When *we* have trouble, let us learn to pray.

But again, James tells us to PRAY WHEN THINGS GO RIGHT (v. 13b).

Things do not always go wrong. Sometimes they go right—beautifully right. Maybe we prayed in trouble and God answered our prayers in a wonderful way. Now, instead of feeling bad, we feel good. We have seen how James tells us to express the emotions of sadness and depression. But what if we feel *happy*; how should we express *that* emotion?

In days past rather fanciful and extravagant ways were devised for expressing what some considered to be God-given emotions. In religious services, people leaped into the air and shouted, jumped over pews, danced in the aisles, and rolled on the floor.⁶ Today such exercises have become more restrained, but there is still a large⁷ segment of the religious community that believes that the way to release such emotions is to hold up the hands and wave them while repeating aloud phrases like “Hallelujah” and “Praise Jesus.” In fact some hold that one who does *not* engage in such exhibitions is not really “Spirit-filled.”

But James prescribes another way to express spiritual joy: “Is any merry? *let him sing psalms*” (v. 13b; italics mine).⁸

The word “merry” just means happy, full of joy. The ASV has, “Is any *cheerful*? let him sing praises.” (Italics mine.)

We can go to two extremes regarding prayer. Some of us forget to pray when we have problems. Instead of going to God, we worry. But others of us are quick to pray when trouble comes, but we fail to pray when everything is all right, when our prayers have been answered. James covers both possibilities in verse 13: He tells us to pray when things go wrong and to pray when things go right.

But I can hear someone ask, "Where did you get the idea that we should *pray* when we are happy? My Bible says we should sing when we are happy." And that is true as far as it goes. Stay with me while we discuss the phrasing and all that is implied by it.

The KJV has "let him sing psalms." It is generally agreed that the writer is speaking of songs of adoration and thanksgiving. As already noted, the ASV has "let him sing *praise*." (Italics mine.)

That entire phrase is translated from the Greek word *psalleteo*, the present imperative of *psallo*. *Psallo* originally had a varied meaning, ranging from a carpenter snapping his chalkline to an archer twanging his bowstring. By New Testament times, however, it simply meant to sing. For instance, Bagster's *Analytical Greek Lexicon*, after noting that the etymology of the word refers to moving, twitching, touching, striking, then says, "In [the] N.T. to sing praises."⁹ Thayer's lexicon also notes the varied background and then says "in the N.T. to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song,"¹⁰ and gives James 5:13 as an example. Moulton and Milligan's *Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* again stresses that in the New Testament, the word means to "sing a hymn" and refers to James 5:13.¹¹

I mention this in passing because occasionally someone tries to find a mechanical instrument of music in this verse. One notes the KJV phrasing and argues, "It says to sing psalms and in the Old Testament, David played on a harp when he sang psalms," ignoring the fact that there are New Testament psalms (1 Corinthians 14:26) along with the Old Testament psalms and ignoring the fact that the Old Testament has been nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:14ff.)¹² Or another appeals to earlier days when the word *psallo* could be applied to the plucking of the strings of an instrument, ignoring the fact that by

New Testament times, the word referred only to *singing*—vocal music.¹³ But the verse is simply speaking of singing—singing praises to God.

Singing has always been a natural way to express emotions. There are songs of sadness and songs of happiness. There are songs that reveal the inner most feelings of the heart; and songs that are a public celebration of joy. And there are songs that express the deepest of spiritual feelings. In Bible times and today, singing has been and is a vital part of our worship of the Most High. Again the present tense is used in this part of James 5:13. James literally says, "Let him *keep* on singing."

But I still need to finish showing why I believe that the concept of prayer can be derived from the phrase "sing psalms" or "sing praise." In Ephesians 5:19, 20,¹⁴ we have these instructions concerning singing: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." There are two directions our songs can go: We can direct them to each other ("Speaking to *yourselves* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"). These are *teaching* and *encouragement* songs—songs like "On a Hill Far Away" and "O Why Not Tonight?" Or we can direct our songs to God ("singing and making melody in your heart to *the Lord*"). These are *prayer* songs, songs of praise and thanksgiving—songs like "We Praise Thee, O God" or "O Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

It is the latter that is in view in the last part of James 5:13. When we are happy, when things go right, let our minds turn to *God*. Let us sing songs of praise and adoration and thanksgiving for all our wondrous blessings!

To make this as personal and practical as possible, for a few moments, let us look at ourselves. When things go right for us, what do we do? When we are happy, how do we express that happiness? Do we come home and say, "Hey, honey, guess what?! I got that raise! Let us go eat out and go to a movie and celebrate!" Do we say "I really feel good! I feel like doing something—let us have a party!"

Do not misunderstand me. These are not wrong; in fact, I have been known to recommend them on occasion. But what I am asking is this,

are these the *only* ways we express our happiness? Are these the *first* things that come to mind when life is good? Or do we first of all think of Him who made all this possible? Have we learned the message of this verse: “Is any merry, let him sing psalms”?

Let it be noted that no formal worship service is under discussion in James 5:13. Prayer and singing are important parts of our public services, but that is not what the writer has in view. He is rather speaking of the spontaneous response of a heart that is burdened or a heart that is filled with joy—anywhere, any time.

Which brings up this question: Do we like to sing? Do I? Do you? Notice that I did not ask, Do we sing *well*? but rather, Do we *like* to sing? If our hearts are light, is a song likely to slip from our lips? And, if we do like to sing, what kind of songs are likely to slip from our lips? The latest pop song or the top country and western tune? Or songs of praise?¹⁵

Some of us can remember when the home was not filled with the discordant noise of the television, radio, and stereo all going simultaneously and full blast. And perhaps some can remember a gray-haired mother going about her daily chores, singing in a clear sweet voice her favorite hymns of praise. To have such a memory is a precious heritage. What kind of heritage of memory are we leaving to *our* children? Will they remember that *we* loved to sing those precious songs of praise and joy?¹⁶

When things go right, when we are happy, let us turn to God in song and prayer.

But now James again turns our minds back to the area of troubles as he encourages us to PRAY WHEN THERE'S ILLNESS (vv. 14, 15a).

Frankly, the next three verses—verses 14 through 16—involve some knotty problems. One of the problems is that the subjects of sickness and sin are intertwined and it is not easy to determine which is under consideration at all times. For our purposes, I'll be emphasizing the subject of sickness in verse 14 and the first part of verse 15, and then the subject of sin in the latter part of verse 15 and in verse 16. The rest we'll sort out as best we can as we go along.

But—although we may have to wrestle with the verses, I do not want the problems of the text to detract from the main thrust of the passage:

James is telling us that *whatever* our situation in life, we need to *pray*.

Let's look now at verse 14 and the first part of verse 15. The previous verse spoke of afflictions in general. Now James turns to one of the more common of afflictions, illness. He begins, “Is any sick among you?” The word translated “sick” literally means “to be weak, without strength.” It is often used for illness in the New Testament (Matthew 10:8; John 5:7; etc.). If you've had a good case of the “flu” lately,¹⁷ you can identify with those words: “to be weak” and “without strength”!

This is a problem that affects us all. Occasionally, we find someone who says, “I've never been sick a day in my life,” but we tend to take such a statement with a very large pinch of salt.¹⁸ Most of us do not hesitate to admit that we have had, do have, and will have health problems: from headaches to heart problems, from acne to allergies, from the common cold to cancer, from bursitis to backaches. We have health problems and the contemplation of them occupies a considerable portion of our time and energies. As proof, just watch the ads on television. We laugh about the old-time medicine man and his snake-oil that cured everything, but he's not dead. He just sold his wagon, bought some television time and a white jacket, and now is proclaiming that *his* product will cure the sniffing, snuffling, coughing, choking, stuffy, headachy, feverish symptoms that get us all down.

So what *should* we do when we're sick? There are many things we should do when illness strikes, but James says that *prayer* is at the top of the list:

Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let him pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up (vv. 5:14, 15a).

In this passage, the subject of physical illness is the thing under consideration. One of the primary meanings of the word translated “save” is “to heal”—and that is its meaning here. The NASB has “restore,” i.e., will restore to health. And the “raising up” mentioned is not a reference to the bodily resurrection from the dead, but rather to the sick person becoming well and

getting out of bed. The NEB has “the Lord will raise him from his bed.”

Frankly, there are many things about which we cannot be certain in this passage: Why were the elders to be called? Why was oil used? Not too long ago a “faith healer” sent me a sealed plastic packet of “healing prosperity holy anointing oil,” to be applied to any part of my body that was not working one 100 percent—and even to my *money* if I had a shortage there! Shortly after this I received an ad for “anointing oil.” The ad states that “This genuine product is the virgin pure golden oil from the hand picked fruit of the olive tree. . . . blended together with essence of Frankincense and Myrrh from the Holy Land.” Is *this* the kind of thing James is talking about?! Further, what connection does the illness spoken of there have with the sin that is mentioned in the last of verse 15 and in verse 16?

It is my personal opinion that the healing spoken of here is miraculous. This passage was written at a time when miraculous gifts were a part of God’s plan (a temporary plan mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10) for the church. One of those miraculous gifts was the gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:9). In those days before the New Testament was complete and readily available, it was the practice of the apostles, as they traveled, to lay their hands on certain ones to impart to them these miraculous gifts (Acts 8:17; 19:6). Thus, local congregations could carry on their activities in the absence of an apostle and in the absence of a written book of instructions we call the New Testament. It is my opinion that that is the situation depicted here. The promise of healing seems to be quite definite: “And the prayer of faith *shall* save [or heal] the sick, and the Lord *shall* raise him up”—which was much more likely to be true in a case of miraculous healing than in a simple providential response to prayer. The NEB has, “The Lord *will* raise him from his bed.” (Italics mine.)

If my view is correct, one reason the elders could have been called is that they would have been a logical choice to have received the laying-on of the apostles’ hands. And if my view is correct, the use of the oil was probably ceremonial or symbolic—similar to its use in anointing a priest, prophet, or king (1 Samuel 16:13; etc).¹⁹ And if my view is correct, while there are many lessons we can draw from these verses, we have

to keep in mind that the situation pictured here is not 100 percent parallel to our own, since miracles ceased when the New Testament was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8-13; James 1:25; etc).²⁰

But we cannot be dogmatic about the healing mentioned here being miraculous. There are various problems with such a view. For instance, such a view does not completely explain why the elders were called. I think we can safely say that others than elders had the gift of healing (1 Corinthians 12:9, 31). And even if an elder had an apostle’s hands laid on him, why should the elder automatically receive that particular gift? Why not rather the gift of “governments” (KJV) or “administrators” (NASB) (1 Corinthians 12:28)²¹ or some other gift that would be more directly related to his God-given responsibilities?

So we look at the passage again—this time from the viewpoint that the healing referred to is *not* miraculous.

If the healing is not miraculous, then the promise of the first part of verse 15 is to be understood as *conditional*—as so many other passages on the power of prayer are: “The prayer of faith shall save [heal] the sick” *if* this is in accordance with the purposes of God. “The Lord shall raise him up [from his sick bed]” *if* we pray according to His will.²²

Again, if the healing is not miraculous, then one of the reasons the elders were called would have been their character. Verse 16 notes that “the effectual fervent prayer of a *righteous* man availeth much” and if elders are scripturally qualified, they are righteous men. One of the qualifications of an elder is that he must be “blameless” (Titus 1:6, 7)—a man of holy reputation. Another reason the elders may have been called would be if the physical illness was tied to a *spiritual* problem—as seems to be indicated by the text. In that case, the *first* need of the individual would have been for spiritual restoration—and then physical healing. For this the spiritual shepherds of the flock would have been eminently qualified.

Further, if the healing is not miraculous then the oil was probably used medicinally—as it was by the Good Samaritan, who poured oil and wine into the wounds of the man who had been beaten (Luke 10:34).²³ While oil itself is not medicine, it can promote healing. It feels soothing

and, since it is not readily dissolved by water, it serves to cut off exposure to the air and air-borne infection.²⁴

But to assert that the healing referred to is not miraculous does not solve all the problems of the text. The elders would not be the only “righteous” men in the congregations or the only ones who could help with a spiritual problem. And most puzzling of all, why should *elders* be applying medicine?

Having seen some of the challenges of the text, let me say that we are on safer ground to affirm that the passage is *not* talking about certain things:

For instance, the passage is *not* talking about the ritual called “Extreme Unction,” more popularly known as “the last rites.” Extreme Unction, a ritual in which oil is applied to the sense organs as certain prayers are said, was named in the fifth century as the fifth of the Catholic sacraments and three centuries later was established as we know it today. Although James 5:14-16 is sometimes used to try to justify the practice,²⁵ there is no relationship between the Catholic sacrament and the commandments in our text: In James, it is the *elders* who are called, not the priests.²⁶ And in James the purpose of the anointing of the oil and the prayers is to make the person *well*, not to prepare him for death.

Again this passage is *not* given to justify the fanciful and flamboyant practices of so-called “faith healers” of today. I have already mentioned that I have received a packet of “holy anointing oil” in the mail. I have *also* received a healing cloth, a healing handkerchief, a prayer rug, a prayer candle, and (the latest) a shower cap that has had the healer’s hands laid on it! Turn on your television set day or night and if you can receive several channels, chances are good that you can see some “healer” laying on hands on people, laying hands on the lens of the television camera, or hitting people on the head. As previously noted, miracles were never intended to be a permanent part of the structure of the church and ceased when the apostles and those on whom they had laid hands died.²⁷ But even apart from that, there are many striking differences between what is described in James 5 and what is practiced today.

In the first place, James does not say to take the sick to a big “healing meeting.” He rather

says to call men in to pray over him. On a recent television interview,²⁸ Wyatt Sawyer noted that if men really have the gift of healing today as they claim, the circus-like atmosphere of the big “Holy Ghost rallies” would be totally unnecessary: if they *really* had the gift, they could and would go to the local hospitals and empty them of all their patients—including all terminally ill cancer patients and other incurables!²⁹ Then again, James says to call for the elders of the church, *not* the “faith healers.” Further, it should be noted that the *faith* involved is the faith of the one doing the praying, not the faith of the one prayed over (“let *them* pray over him . . . and the prayer of faith shall save the sick”); this is mentioned because a common excuse used today, if there is not healing, is that there was a lack of faith on the part of the one who needed the healing. No, this passage gives no consolation to those who today proclaim the new “health and wealth gospel.”

But having said all that, let me hasten to say again that we should not let this discussion and our uncertainty about some of the details keep us from recognizing and appreciating some of the great truths that James proclaims in this passage. What *are* some of these lessons?

There is the lesson of the importance of prayer when illness comes. Whether or not the contest is that of the age of miracles or whether it is not, the lesson is still the same: When there is illness, we should pray to God. The body of the child of God is called “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 6:19) and we are taught to be concerned about it. When David’s baby was sick, he prayed for him (2 Samuel 12). When Hezekiah was ill, he prayed and God heard his prayer (2 Kings 2). When Paul had “a thorn in the flesh,” he prayed (2 Corinthians 12:8ff.). Epaphroditus “was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him” (Philippians 2:27).

We need to understand that all healing is divine—not miraculous today, but still divine. Over the main portal of the Presbyterian Medical Center in Manhattan, New York, are inscribed these words: “All healing is of God; physicians only bind up the wounds.” This is no longer the age of miracles, but that is not to say that God does not hear and answer prayer. God does not work contrary to natural law (i.e., miraculously), but He does work *through* His laws of nature (i.e.,

providentially). And God knows more about those laws than we do, after all He *made* the human body. The more we discover about the body, the more we discover we do not know.³⁰

Sometimes when we pray for the sick we seem to limit God to what *we* know about the body: We ask God to bless the doctors, the nurses, the medicine, the surgical procedures. Let us pray for all those, but let us also acknowledge that God knows far more than we do—and just ask Him to do all He can in accordance with His will and the wondrous way He has made us!

But we need also to say that we must learn to pray, as did Jesus, “not my will, but thine be done” (Luke 22:42). Rather than remove the illness, God may give us the grace to bear it, as He did in the case of Paul (2 Corinthians 12:9ff.). But regardless of the answer, the lesson in James 5:14 is that we should pray for the sick.

A second lesson from this passage is that in the case of illness, God expects us to do what *we* can.

Some religious people teach against standard medical procedures. Some are against blood transfusions,³¹ some are against the use of medical doctors and medicine of any kind, believing that the use of such indicates a lack of faith in God.³² Many unfortunate deaths of innocent children have resulted from such a philosophy. When my mother was teaching school, one little boy in her class was always getting cut or scraped and his parents would not allow any medicine to be put on the wounds. As the child’s physical condition deteriorated, she finally got the parents to agree to allow her to put Band-aids on the affected areas—and then she used the Band-aids, available at that time, that had a built-in antiseptic in the gauze!

But this passage, along with others, teaches us that *we* should do what *we* can when illness comes. James says to call for the elders, use oil, and so forth. As I already noted, we cannot be dogmatic about the purpose of the oil,³³ but still it had *some* purpose, and no doubt James’ readers knew exactly what that purpose was. They would have understood that God does not do for us what we can do for ourselves.

Nothing in the Bible goes contrary to modern medical practices, as long as those practices are ethical and right within themselves.³⁴ Luke “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14) worked side

by side with Paul, who performed great miracles. There are many accounts in the Bible of “medicine” being used (Luke 10:33ff.) and even recommended (1 Timothy 5:23). I believe with all my heart that each medical breakthrough is a blessing from God himself, the source of “every good . . . and . . . perfect gift! (James 1:17). And how blessed we have been! My grandmother on my father’s side died in the influenza epidemic of 1921; now “flu” is grouped with the common cold as one of the common irritations of life. We have seen polio banished. We have seen the marvels of open heart surgery and organ transplants become common place—with progress even being made regarding cancer. So as illness comes, let us take advantage of the best medical help available and thank God for His manifold blessings.

There is also another lesson in James 5:14, 15 that we would not want to miss—and that is the importance of the work of elders. Whether I ever understand all the implications of the command or not, the simple fact is that James says when there is illness,³⁵ one should call for the *elders* of the church.

Let it be noted that James did *not* say that one should call for the preacher, the local evangelist. Don’t misunderstand me. As a member of the congregation, I *want* to visit those who are sick and in the hospital and help in any way I can. Anytime I am asked to visit someone I will do my best to comply with that request. But I fear sometimes that we have a denominational attitude concerning the preacher and try to turn him into a modern “pastor.” It is not uncommon for people to think first of the preacher when there is illness, rather than the elders. As an illustration of the attitude I am talking about, I have seldom heard elders criticized for failing to visit the sick, but I have frequently heard of preachers being criticized for failure to visit as much as we think they should, as though that was their primary God-given role in life.

I’m sure most realize who these “elders” are, who are to be called. They are the leaders of the local congregations (Acts 20:17).³⁶ They are also known as the bishops (or overseers) and pastors (shepherds of the flock) (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4; Titus 1:5, 7).

They have been given the oversight of the local congregation. Some day they will have to

give an account for all those under their oversight. We are to respect them and follow their leadership (Hebrews 13:7, 17). As the shepherds of our souls, it should be the most natural thing in the world to turn to them when trouble comes into our lives!

It has been my privilege through the years to work with concerned and loving elderships. So many occasions come to mind of elders praying in elders' meetings and in public services for those who are sick. And so many scenes flood into the memory of packed hospital waiting rooms with the elders and their wives present as all waited after tragedy had struck, waiting with tears and prayers for the doctor's report.

Perhaps someone objects, "But I don't *know* the elders well enough to call on them when I'm sick." Then you need to get to know them. They "watch for your" soul (Hebrews 13:17); you need to feel close to them. Talk to them before and after the services. Invite them into your home. Share your life with them. Then how natural it will be to fulfill James' command to call on them when serious illness is our lot!

But now let us note the last part of verse 15 as James adds this thought: PRAY WHEN THERE'S SIN.

At first glance, James seems to change the subject rather abruptly. After saying that the prayer of faith shall save the sick, the writer adds, "And if he have committed *sins*, they shall be forgiven him" (v. 15b; italics mine).

It is the blending of the teaching on sickness and sin that challenges our thinking. Exactly what did James have in mind? Possibly all that James is trying to get across is that the spiritual man should not be neglected in our concern for the physical man. If the person who was sick also had spiritual problems, those, too, should be disposed of. After all, spiritual health is much more important than physical health.

It is also possible that James is acknowledging the fact that many do not become concerned about their spiritual condition until their physical lives are threatened.³⁷ When that is the case, *then* they are more likely to call for the elders and not only ask for prayers for their illnesses, but also for forgiveness of their sins.

And it is even possible that James is suggesting some *connection* between the sin referred to and the sickness!³⁸ The present tense is used in

this passage (as it is in most of this section), so the last of verse 15 could be translated, "And if he has *continually* committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." A life of habitual, continual sin can dissipate and harm the body. There can be a connection between sin and sickness.

Let me hasten to say that I'm not suggesting that all sickness is a result of sin—that there is always a connection between sin and sickness. The disciples made that mistake. When they saw a man who had been blind from birth, they asked Jesus, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Jesus answered, "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (John 9:3). Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was not the result of personal sin, but rather was to keep him humble (2 Corinthians 12:7ff.).³⁹

But sometimes there is a connection between specific sins and specific illnesses. A common illustration of certain health problems is related to sexual promiscuity, such as venereal diseases. This is included in what Paul was speaking of when he wrote concerning homosexuality: "Men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in *themselves* that recompense of their error which was meet [or suitable]" (Romans 1:27). The NIV says they "received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion." A recent illustration of this type of thing has been the herpes epidemic largely spread by unscriptural sexual activity. The most recent illustration is the concern about AIDS—the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. Seventy percent of those with AIDS are male homosexuals. One homosexual sadly said, "It looks like we may have to choose between our lifestyle and life itself."

But we should not think that sexual transgression is the only sin that affects our health. The headline on a recent *Reader's Digest* article notes that "recent scientific research shows that our emotions profoundly affect our health."⁴⁰ Anger, bitterness, anxiety, hatred not only affect our souls, they also affect our bodies. Mental and emotional sin can cause and aggravate heart and circulation problems, stomach disorders, asthma and allergies, and a hundred other aches and pains. It can even cause us to catch cold more easily!⁴¹

Especially is all this true when we fail to repent of our sins. Psalm 32 is a good illustration

of this. In this psalm, David is apparently referring back to his sordid sin with Bathsheba and his ungodly efforts to cover up that sin by the murder of Uria. In the psalm, David first tells how good it is to feel forgiven of sin: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile” (Psalms 32:1, 2).

Then, however. David speaks of the physical, emotional, and spiritual agony he went through as long as he tried to conceal his sin:

When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring [or “groaning”—NIV] all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer [NIV—“my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer”] (Psalms 32:3, 4).

He aged overnight. He had constant aches and pains. He could not sleep. He became weak. Yes, there can be a connection between sin and sickness!⁴²

But to return to our text and the main point: When sin (and its consequences) is in our life, what should we do? Many things. But again James stresses that near the top of the list is *prayer*.

In Acts 8, the apostle Peter commanded *the sinner himself* to pray: “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God. . . .” (v. 22). Now James adds the thought of praying *for each other* when we sin. In verse 14, he stressed the need of praying for one another in case of illness; now he speaks of mutual prayer in case of sin: “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (5:16).

One paraphrase ties this verse with the last part of verse 15 in this way: “Since God is ready to forgive your sins, then confess them to one another and also pray for each other.”⁴³

It is significant that the prayer spoken of here is preceded by confession. It has been often noted that “confession is good for the soul.” Both religious and secular writers speak of the cathartic (or cleansing) value of confession.

As already suggested, it is possible that these were unhealthy, emotionally, and spiritually because of hidden sin. Like an abscess deep

within the body, unacknowledged sin can poison both mind and body—and, like the abscess, often there is the need to expose and drain the source of infection. We have just read of David’s agony as long as he attempted to cover his sin. How did he find relief? We continue the reading in Psalm 32: “*I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*” (Psalms 32:5; italics mine).

But whether or not there are physical and emotional consequences to our sins, confession is still of great value—to combat pride if for no other reason. Pride is one of our greatest spiritual obstacles—to penitence, to forgiveness, to spiritual growth. Pride is a point of vulnerability under constant attack by Satan (1 John 2:16). A willingness to admit our faults will go far in overcoming pride.

The Wise Man said, “He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). John the Immerser saw the value of confessing wrong. When people came to him for baptism, they were “confessing their sins” (Matthew 3:6).

The *first* One to whom we should confess our sins is *God*. John refers to this in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” But James stresses that there is also value in confessing to *each another*: “Confess your faults one to another.” Once more the present tense is used,⁴⁴ indicating continuous action. Phillips translates the first part of the verse: “You should get into the habit of admitting your sins to one another, and praying for one another.”

Let it be noted that this confessing of faults is not referring to the Catholic practice of Auricular Confession.⁴⁵ “Auricular” means “in the ear.” Auricular Confession refers to the confession of sin “in the ear” of a priest in the confessional box. But James 5:16 doesn’t say to confess to a priest, but rather to one another,⁴⁶ not in a box but in a situation of mutual trust and concern.

What is it we are to confess? The KJV has the word “faults,” but the word in the original is just the word for sins—the same word translated “sins” in verse 15. We are to confess our sins. What sins?

Any sins. The Amplified version expands the word “sins” in its translation: “Your slips, your false steps, your offenses, your sins.” Some try to limit the word “faults” or “sins” to a sin committed against the one to whom we are confessing⁴⁷ but I do not find that limitation in the verse. *Any* sin can affect the soul and body. Confess *any* sin. Confess *specific* sin. Don’t confess, “If I have sinned, I’m sorry.” Confess that you *have* sinned.

This command ties in with what we generally call “a public confession”; it shows that such an action is permissible and can be beneficial.

Sometimes young people (and others) ask, “If I repent of my sin and pray to God, why do I need to respond in a public way?”⁴⁸ Sometimes one doesn’t need to make a public confession, but sometimes one does. The principle involved is that of *repentance*: True repentance involves clearing up the past as far as is humanly possible. Paul said that he preached to the Gentiles “that they should repent and turn to God, and do *works* meet for [or suited to] repentance” (Acts 26:20).⁴⁹ This principal is illustrated in Matthew 5:23, 24:

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.

Jesus says that if I have sinned against someone, I need to go to that person personally and straighten out that matter. Maybe I said cruel things to my wife. I need to go to her personally and say, “What I did was unchristian. It was wrong—and I’m ashamed that I did it.” But what if a dozen people know about my sin? Or a hundred? Or a whole congregation? At some point it becomes impossible to go to every person individually—or even, in many cases, to be sure who all *does* know. Sometimes a *public* confession of sins is the only practical course of action open to us. Guy N. Woods in his commentary on James, underlines this point with these words:

We are to pray one for another. We may, however, effectively do so, only when a brother confesses his sins and turns away from them. (1 John 5:16) . . . It is necessary in the nature of the case that those who have known of the sins should have equal knowledge of the penitence. But, this we can know only through a confession of the brother involved. *It is, therefore, a practical rule that the confession should be as public as is the sin.*⁵⁰

A public confession of sins lets many know of our penitence⁵¹—and gains for us the benefit of the prayer of many righteous souls.

But having noted that the confession of James 5:16 can include a public confession of sins, let us stress that we would be doing the passage a terrible injustice to *limit* it to that—or even to suggest that this is the *primary* teaching of the passage.

The passage is first and foremost of all pointing up the need for mutual confession and mutual prayer. Each of us has the need for others with whom we can be completely open—ones with whom we can unburden our souls and share our loads. “Bear ye one another’s burden,” said Paul, “and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Many of us have found such a person in a loving Christian mate. Others have found good Christian friends that help and strengthen them.

One Christian who lived an ungodly life for many years prior to his conversion said the only thing he missed about his former life was his friendly neighborhood bartender—one with whom he could share all his shortcomings without having someone jump down his throat. What an indictment of the rest of us. There needs to be an atmosphere of love and acceptance in the church, where we can feel free to confess our sins one to another—and pray one for another.

Let me quickly say, however, that although James 5:16 teaches us to confess *any* sin, it does not teach that we of necessity must confess *every* sin. I need to confess every “public” sin, but some things are between God and me alone, things that no one else knows about. On occasion I may need to confess to a trusted friend even those matters of the heart. But there are some things that, if brought up, would be of benefit to no one else.

I mention this because there is a cultic practice being embraced by some in the church, where one is under *obligation* to confess all of one’s sins to a “prayer partner”⁵²—including every sinful thought—and is made to feel guilty if the innermost transgression is not laid bare. R. V. G. Tasker notes that this “is apt to have more harmful than beneficial results, giving an outlet for an unhealthy exhibitionism.”⁵³ It also goes contrary to the spirit of this passage—which (among other

things) teaches the need for a loving and caring voluntary⁵⁴ sharing of mutual problems and prayers!

But let me now return to the overall subject, the subject of prayer. James says, “And *pray* one for another, that ye may be healed.”

Again, there is considerable disagreement over whether the healing spoken of in this section is physical or spiritual. As already noted several times, it is possible that the physical illness referred to was a result of spiritual problems—and that there could be no physical healing until the spiritual problem had been resolved. In light of the context, there is a strong possibility that this is the kind of healing under consideration.

But the word “healing” can also refer to spiritual healing. Jeremiah uses the word often with significance, as in Jeremiah 3:22; “Return, ye backsliding children and I will heal your backslidings.” Used in this sense, “healing” would refer to forgiveness of sins and restoration to the favor of God. The translators of the Amplified Bible apparently were convinced that this was the meaning here, for their translation reads: “. . . that you may be healed and restored—to a spiritual tone of mind and heart”

Again, the point being made is that *there is power in prayer*. If preceded by the proper conditions, prayer has power to help the body and free the soul. Thus the verse closes, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Which introduces us to the second main point of our text.

Remember that the first main point is that we are to pray in every circumstance of life—when we are in trouble, when we’re happy, if we’re sick, if we’ve committed sin, whenever and wherever! God does not want to simply read our hearts; He wants us to *express* our thoughts, our thanksgiving, our requests—in *prayer*. “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

II. PRAY BECAUSE PRAYER IS POWERFUL (5:16b-18)

We are to pray all the time because prayer is powerful. The latter part of verse 16 says, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” This is an amazing passage on the power of prayer. The prayer of a righteous man is said to be “effectual” (the

NIV has “effective”). But further, this effectual prayer “availeth.” But it not only avails, it “availeth much.”

Every word of this passage is packed with meaning. The *person* whose prayer is powerful is described in the words “a righteous man.” James doesn’t say the prayer of an eloquent preacher is powerful, or the prayer of a noted church leader, or even the prayer of one who claims some special gift from God. Rather he says that the prayer of a *righteous* man is powerful—or, as Phillips puts it, the prayer of “a good man.” He may be unassuming and his prayers may not be eloquent, but if he is a Christian and his life is right, his prayers are powerful!

The *kind* of prayer that is powerful is described in the KJV by the words “fervent prayer”—not just praying, but praying *fervently*. The type of prayer spoken of there is a “petition,”⁵⁵ a “supplication.”⁵⁶ The context indicates intensity, praying without wavering. Phillips translation uses the word “earnest” If our prayers are to have power, we must get serious about praying!

Then we have the words that emphasize *how much* potential power prayer has. “Effectual” is translated from the Greek word from which we get the English word *energy*. Prayer can energize our lives. A life without prayer is like a car without fuel. A \$10,000 car without energy in the tank is of little value; put some energy in the tank and, all other things being equal, it can take you 100,000 miles! Even so, a life without prayer can never be what it should be, but with prayer, it can be an *energized* life!

Finally, there are the words “availeth much.” “Availeth” comes from a Greek word that means “is strong” or powerful. “Much” just means “very.” So “availeth much” means “is *very* strong.”⁵⁷ The NIV says that prayer “is powerful.” The RSV notes that prayer “has great power.” Phillips stresses that “*tremendous* power” is inherent in prayer.

In the early days of mankind, man himself was the measure of what could be accomplished, so the world spoke of “manpower.” Then the strength of animals was harnessed, and man spoke of “horsepower.” Then came dynamite power and, in recent days, atomic power. But James speaks of something more powerful than any of these—*prayer* power.

You and I *need* this power. A life without prayer power will always be lacking. *With* power life can be as full as God intended that it should be.

But this brings up the question, *How* does this happen? How does God bring it about? And I must say, frankly, that I do not know. Not long ago I did extensive reading on this passage in various commentaries and study books. Much of what I read left me greatly dissatisfied—for so many writers seemed to be more concerned with human psychology than with divine intervention. Here, as in so many other situations, Isaiah 55:8, 9 seems appropriate: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

As already noted in this lesson, the Bible teaches that God does not work miraculously today in this world, but at the same time, the Bible teaches that God *does* work, that He *is* active (Romans 8:28). It teaches that He responds to our prayers as a loving father responds to the requests of his children. In the words of Jesus: “If ye [fathers] then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?” (Matthew 7:11).

I may not know and understand all that is involved in God answering my prayers, but I know He does. And this is enough for me to know. I know prayer is powerful!

To impress this indelibly on our hearts, James now gives an illustration from the Old Testament, an illustration of a righteous man whose prayer availed much:

Elias [or Elijah] was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit (vv. 17, 19).

The full story is found in 1 Kings 17 and 18. As the story begins, the prophet Elijah is going to Ahab, king of Israel, and saying to him, “As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word” (1 Kings 17:1). The rest of chapter 17 tells about God’s protection of Elijah

over the next 3½ years—as He provides Elijah with food and keeps him hidden from Ahab, first by the brook Cherith and then in the home of the widow of Zarephath. At the beginning of chapter 18, however, God says to Elijah, “Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth” (1 Kings 18:1). Elijah goes to show himself to Ahab and meets Obadiah, the governor of Ahab’s house, who is looking for grass for Ahab’s horses and mules. With some difficulty Elijah convinces Obadiah to bring Ahab to him.

When they are face to face again after 3½ years, Ahab asks, “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17). Elijah replies, “I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim” (1 Kings 18:18). The prophet then challenges the king to gather all Israel and the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel. There then follows the classic confrontation of Elijah and the prophets of Baal, climaxed by the fire of God consuming the prophet’s sacrifice, the altar it was on, and even the water in the trench surrounding it. The people fall on their faces and cry, “The Lord, he is the God: the Lord, he is the God” (1 Kings 18:39), and then rise up and kill the prophets of Baal. Notice now 1 Kings 18:41-45:

And Elijah said unto Ahab, Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of abundance of rain. So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel; and he cast himself down upon the earth, and put his face between his knees, and said to his servant, Go up now, look toward the sea, And he said, Go again seven times.

And it came to pass at the seventh time, that he said, Behold there ariseth a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand. And he said, Go up, say unto Ahab, Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the meanwhile, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain.

It is an amazing story demonstrating the power of God—and James stresses that at the heart of it is *prayer*.

But someone may object, “I don’t see how there can be a parallel here with *my* prayer life. After all Elijah was a very unusual person. He was a prophet of God and endued with special powers.” James seems to anticipate such an objection for he begins verse 17 by saying, “Elias [or Elijah] was a man subject to like passions [or feelings] as *we* are.” (Italics mine.)

In the four hundred years between Malachi and the coming of Christ, the Jews had developed an exaggerated concept of Elijah, making him a mysterious heavenly figure. James says that such a view of Elijah is incorrect. True, he was a righteous man, but he wasn't perfect. He had the same emotions we have—and the same weaknesses. The NIV says Elijah was “a man just like us.” The NEB says he was “a man with human frailties like our own.” After 1 Kings 18 tells of the great contest on Mount Carmel and the power of prayer, the very next chapter, chapter 19, tells of Elijah getting discouraged and wishing he were dead.

Why then was Elijah's prayer powerful? First of all, because he was *the kind of person* whose prayers are powerful—the “righteous” man of verse 16. And, second, because he prayed *the kind of prayer* that is powerful. The KJV says, “He prayed *earnestly* that it might not rain.” The ASV has, “He prayed *fervently*.” In the original language a Hebrew figure of speech is used. The passage literally says, “He prayed *with prayer*.” It is possible that sometimes we do not pray “with prayer,” that we rather just say words. But Elijah really prayed, prayed with all his being.

What did he pray for? “He prayed earnestly that it might not rain.” This gives us a detail that we don't get from 1 Kings 17. There Elijah simply announces to Ahab that it is not going to rain for a number of years (1 Kings 17:1). James lets us know, however, that the drought not only ended with prayer, it also began with prayer.

And how powerful was that prayer? “It rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.” Here was a prayer so powerful that it affected the weather of the area—and thus the entire economic structure—for 3½ years! Jesus also spoke of “the days of [Elijah], when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the earth” (Luke 4:25). Three and one-half years—that is some prayer!

Then James says, “And he prayed *again*, and the heaven gave rain.” (Italics mine.) As a matter of fact the indication is that he prayed at least seven times; he was persistent in prayer. “And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit” (v. 18).

I'm not sure why James chose this particular illustration of the power of prayer. It was spectacular, but so were many other Old Testament

examples of answered prayer. I like to think that James chose this specific example because it is more of an illustration of providence than the miraculous—in other words, God working *through* natural law (as He does today) rather than contrary to natural law. The rain did not come from a clear sky; it came from the sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and it grew. That is the way rain came in that area. The hot winds from the east and south brought drought, but the west wind brought the moisture from the Mediterranean Sea and refreshed the land.

So what is the point of the illustration? Is James just teaching us to pray for rain when there's been a long dry spell? Is he saying that if we pray for rain, God will automatically answer our prayers? I like the way Guy N. Woods answers this question:

If we are disposed to wonder if a similar prayer prayed today—that is from rain or for its cessation—would be answered, we may be sure that if the same circumstances existed and the will of the Lord was the same, the result would likewise be the same. However, where the circumstances differ so greatly, and we are not sure what the will of the Lord is in such matters, our prayers should always be conditioned by the desire that the will of the Lord be done.⁵⁸

We understand that this is *not* primarily written to encourage us to have prayer meetings in dry weather! Not that that is a bad idea, but this is rather written to encourage us to pray *all* the time, to pray everywhere, to pray under every circumstance—because there is power in prayer! Even though it is not the age of miracles, God can still work *through* natural law to answer our prayers! In the words of the Psalmist: “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thy heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass” (Psalms 37:4, 5).

CONCLUSION

In this section, James challenges us to pray when there is trouble, when things are going right, when there is illness, when there is sin—to learn to always rely on the power of God. We may think we do not have the time to pray that much. We get so busy, so involved with so many things, that we crowd out the time to pray. But then perhaps we get sick—or a loved one gets

sick or is involved in a terrible accident—and we suddenly find that we have a great deal of time to pray!

Don't neglect your prayer life. You *need* the power of prayer in your life—every moment of every hour of every day of your life!

But even as we study the power of prayer, we must re-emphasize James' qualification: It is prayer of a *righteous* man that avails much. Is your prayer life what it should be? Is your life what it should be? Are you right with God?

FOOTNOTES

¹An alternate title is this: "Does It Pay to Pray Today?"

²This is from the hymn, "Pray All The Time." (Italics mine.) This hymn has a similar tune to "On Top of Old Smokey," which was released at about the same time. Both songwriters wondered if the other had borrowed from his song. A court finally decreed that both had unconsciously revived an old tune from their youth. Many of our young people have never heard of "On Top of Old Smokey," which was so popular years ago, but this hymn lives on. It is a lovely song about prayer!

³A. T. Robertson, *Studies in the Epistle of James* (Nashville: Broadman, n.d.), p. 186.

⁴I am using the word *depressed* in its common meaning, not in the extreme psychological significance.

⁵Doctors tell us that one of the big problems in treating high blood pressure is that the patient tends to stop taking his medicine when he gets to feeling better.

⁶When I was a boy, on occasion at night I would sit across the street from church buildings, looking through the open doors and windows at the goings-on. Once our parents took my brother and me to such a service, apparently feeling that we needed such as part of our education. My brother, who was about seven or eight would shake a little from time to time and mother kept punching him, thinking he was laughing or making fun. When she finally got him alone, she got on to him, and he answered, "I wasn't laughing. I was scared to death!"

⁷And growing!

⁸No blanket condemnation of expressing one's emotions vocally is intended. A hearty "Amen" is always in order (1 Corinthians 14:40ff.) and is being revived today.

⁹*Analytical Greek Lexicon* (London: S. Bagster and Sons, n.d.), p. 441.

¹⁰C. L. Wilibald Grimm and C. G. Wilke, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, trans. and rev. Joseph Henry Thayer (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1973), p. 675.

¹¹Donald Fream, *A Chain of Jewels from James and Jude* (Joplin, Mo.: College Press, 1965), p. 212, quoting James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament* (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1930; reprint, Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1974).

¹²You can expand this thought as needed.

¹³You can expand the idea that the music in the New Testament church was exclusively vocal as needed.

¹⁴See also Colossians 3:16.

¹⁵You may want to spend a bit of time here on how people can develop a love from songs of praise—singing classes, etc. It can be noted that good records and cassettes of *vocal* music can be purchased. I enjoy playing such

cassettes as I drive along in the car and singing along.

¹⁶One of my special memories is of our daughters, my wife, and I singing together in the car as we went on trips.

¹⁷As I write this, almost every family in the congregation has one or more sick with, coming down with, or recovering from the "flu."

¹⁸To use an old expression, we figure that if a person would lie about that, he would lie about anything.

¹⁹Some believe that Mark 6:13 is an example of oil being used in a ceremonial way; others believe that this is an example of oil being used medicinally.

²⁰You can expand this line of thought as needed.

²¹For the moment ignoring the question of whether all the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30 were miraculous in nature.

²²This would be an excellent time to include some of the conditions of acceptable prayer.

²³Isaiah 1:6 is another reference to oil (or ointment) used medicinally.

²⁴Your older members may remember Watkin's Black Salve, sold by the Watkins man house to house in a flat tin and "good for man and beast." It was mainly a mixture of crude oil and carbolic acid. It and similar products are still available today, but they are no longer the frequently used cure-all they once were.

²⁵This is in a footnote in the Douay Bible.

²⁶An effort is made to make "presbyters" sometimes mean the same as "priests," but any relationship in the words is manmade, not Bible-based.

²⁷Here is another opportunity to expand on this important truth.

²⁸This was on our local program, "The Truth in Love," which goes via cable to most of Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas.

²⁹Before it is objected that Jesus, Paul and others did not cure *every* person, let it be noted that the official doctrine of most charismatic groups today is that all sickness is from the devil and that God does not want and does not intend for *anyone* to be sick.

³⁰The common illustration is this: The bigger the island of knowledge grows, the more extensive the shoreline of ignorance becomes.

³¹Jehovah's Witnesses.

³²Christian Scientists, some Pentecostal groups, etc.

³³You may want to note that it is a basic principle of Bible interpretation that no vital doctrine should ever be based on an ambiguous passage. Since the meaning of this passage about oil used in this fashion is not clear, to develop a teaching concerning the use of "healing oil" today is at the best highly suspect. One of our elders, Eddie Whitten, recently noted that although we may guess that olive oil is the kind of oil prescribed—and then he produced a can of 10W-40 motor oil as another possibility.

³⁴There are, of course, some medical practices, such as abortion, that violate basic scriptural principles, and there are other medical practices that are presently the subject of much theological discussion.

³⁵A number of commentaries make the point that the Greek word here is used of serious illness. James is not saying that if we have the sniffles, we should call for the elders.

³⁶In New Testament times, there was no organization bigger than the local congregation. The leaders of the local congregations were known as elders, bishops, or pastors (shepherds). There was always a plurality of these leaders in any given congregation; only one "pastor" over a congregation was unknown. This work was a different work

from that of being a minister, preacher, evangelist. The preacher as such was not a pastor of the pastor of the congregation.

³⁷Remember that the sickness referred to is a serious illness. See Psalms 119:71.

³⁸Some see a parallel between this passage and 1 Corinthians 11:30.

³⁹Another passage that notes that there is no automatic connection between sin and tragedy is Luke 13:1ff.

⁴⁰"Psychosomatic Illness: More Than We Imagine," *Reader's Digest*, February, 1984, p. 139.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴²On the reverse side, many hospitals recognize that spiritual health is related to physical health thus they provide special parking for preachers and often give the minister the same visiting rights as doctors.

⁴³Fream, p. 219.

⁴⁴Present imperative.

⁴⁵A. T. Robertson referred to this as one of the most dangerous of ecclesiastical institutions (*Studies in the Epistle of James*, p. 193).

⁴⁶Luther said, "A strange confessor. His name is 'One Another.'"

⁴⁷Making this passage a parallel with Matthew 5:23, 24.

⁴⁸This was a question placed by one of our young people in our question box.

⁴⁹John the Baptist preached the same. The Prodigal Son is an example of one clearing up the past as a result of repentance. So also is the parable of the boy who "repented and went."

⁵⁰Guy N. Woods, *James*, New Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1972), p. 305. (Italics his.)

⁵¹If desired, it can be noted that the passage does not give details on *how* the confession is made. The usual way is to tell the one who receives the responses and let him pass on the confession. On occasion, however, I had heard individuals make their own confession of sins. It is also possible for the confession and prayer to become private (perhaps in the company of an elder)—and then announced to the congregation. There may also be value in noting that there are *other* reasons for coming forward and requesting the payers of the church. Just because one comes forward does not brand him or her as "the greatest of sinners"!

⁵²Often there is a "senior prayer partner" and a "junior prayer partner."

⁵³Burton Coffman, *Commentary on James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John, Jude*, (Austin, Tex.: Firm Foundation, 1979), p. 128.

⁵⁴It is true that a command is involved, but aside from the general principles of confessing to those against whom we have sinned and confessing a "public" sin. I am at liberty regarding to whom, when, and how much I confess.

⁵⁵Alfred Marshall, *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, 2d ed. (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1966), p. 907.

⁵⁶ASV.

⁵⁷Marshall. (Italics mine.)

⁵⁸Woods, pp. 309, 310.

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