

James 5:13-15

These verses have been the root for a-lot of false teaching that has led to numerous movements that we call the “faith healing, name it claim it” movement. Faith healers have used this verse to claim that every sick Christian can be healed. This passage of Scripture does raise some questions. What kind of suffering does James have in view in vs. 13? What kind of sickness is in view in vs. 14? Why are the prayers of elders different from other believers in vs. 14-15? Does the prayer of faith always save the sick in vs. 15? What kind of healing is in view in vs. 16? The key to understanding this text is to take the context of the passage and apply interpretive methods to it.

James wrote to Jewish believers who had been scattered, cf. Acts 8:1-4, James 1:1. Being both Jewish and Christian they faced hostility from the pagan culture in which they lived. James opened his epistle with an exhortation to patiently endure trials, cf. James 1:2-4. And in chapter five he returns to that theme.

Prayer taps a source of spiritual endurance. There’s a strong commitment to pray. Individuals are called to pray, elders and pastors are called to pray and the congregation is called to pray. The focus is James’s compassionate pastoral care for the flock. There have been spiritual causalities, weak, persecuted and defeated believers.

Application: As the context makes it clear the subject isn’t physical illness but spiritual weakness and the need for spiritual healing. There is spiritual exhaustion, weariness and the need for prayer is vital.

PRAYER AND COMFORT - VS. 13

Suffering is from the Greek word which refers to enduring evil treatment by people. The two other usages of the word are in 2 Timothy 2:9 **“for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned.”** 2 Timothy 4:5 **“But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”**

The antidote to this is praying. Cf. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, 1 Peter 5:7 **“casting all your anxiety (care) on Him, because He cares for you.”** Jonah 2:7 **“While I was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple.”** The present tense form of the verb here suggests a continual pleading with God in prayer. It could also be translated *“let him keep on praying.”* Note: the hymn what a friend we have in Jesus

Those who maintain a cheerful attitude in their suffering are to sing praises. In fact, prayer and praise are closely related. Ephesians 5:19 **“Speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.”** Philippians 4:6 **“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”** Colossians 4:2 **“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”**

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PRAYER AND RESTORATION - Vs. 14-15

Herein lies the most misunderstood and often disputed passages of Scripture. It appears that those who are physically sick can be healed by the prayers of the elders.

The Greek word for sick here is translated 18 times in the NT concerning physical sickness. But it also uses the word to stress emotional or spiritual weakness. Acts 20:35 **"In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak..."** Romans 4:19 reflects Abrahams faith, **"Without becoming weak in faith..."**. We see this clearly in Paul's response to the Corinthians **"Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong"** (2 Corinthians 12:10).

Viewing the word here in James helps us to keep the context in view of the passage. It obviously is referring to those who are weakened by the weariness of life and seem to be sinning by giving up or doubting. They have been defeated in spiritual battles. They have lost the ability to endure. They have lost battles and the desire to pray for motivation to continue. Paul urges Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 **"We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone."** Cf. Romans 7:14-25

The help in these situations comes from the elders/pastors in the church. Weak, defeated believers go to them for prayer. Galatians 6:1a **"Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness..."**. The wounded sheep, weak sheep are to go to the elders of the church for help. In the need for help for the shepherds, deacons were selected in Acts 6:4 so the shepherds could be devoted to this ministry, **"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."**

The anointing of oil doesn't seem to be a symbolic move. Historically, this likely means the rubbing of oil on wounds or bruises from suffering and persecution. The use of this word typically indicates a form of medical treatment. We see the use of this in Mary anointing Jesus with oil and in Mark 6:13 when Jesus had commissioned His disciples **"And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."** According to Greek scholars this literally reads *"after having oiled them."* In the story of the good samaritan in Luke 10:34 **"And came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him."**

Speaking now in James the elders, the shepherds of weak, defeated believers who may have had physical signs of trials, to pray and stimulate them spiritually and encourage them.

James 5:13-15

How are they to do it, in the name of the Lord? To do something in the name of the Lord is to do what Christ would have done. To serve is to serve others as Christ would have done. To pray in the name of the Lord is to pray as Christ would have done.

The prayer of faith will restore them. Again, sick is misleading as we understand sick to be physically afflicted. But the context is referring to the spiritually weak and defeated believers. The word restore is commonly used in the terms of “save” and thus the prayers of elders and pastors would restore them to spiritual wholeness.

The Lord will raise him up. It means to awaken or to arouse. Through prayer the warriors will be awakened and the battered sheep will be restored. Sin often causes spiritual defeat. The antidote to this is prayer. Psalms 32:5 **“I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, And You forgave the guilt of my sin.”** Proverbs 28:13 **“He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.”** 1 John 1:9 **“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”**

The purpose of godly leadership is to help the sheep confess and to see their sin and to pray for restoration. If sin has contributed to the weakness of a believer then he’s forgiven. Restoration has occurred.