

## JAMES 5:13-16a

### PRAYER + FAITH = HEALING

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? 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. The prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”<sup>1</sup>

Many years ago I was leading a study through the Book of James. Arriving at this passage, I asked the participants to speculate why James advised anointing with oil. In addition to the usual responses one would expect of a group of people intent on understanding the Word of God more perfectly, one man said, “If he lubricates the sick person, maybe he’ll slide right out of bed.” I’m not trying to slide sick people out of bed; but I do believe it is important for us to understand what James is saying so that we are equipped to honour the Lord through knowing His will.

In a previous message,<sup>2</sup> I briefly alluded to the subject that is before us today. The message today deals with the poorly understood and oft-abused ministry of anointing the sick for the purpose of healing. There appears to be two extremes among contemporary churches—either viewing anointing as necessary to effect healing, or ignoring this as an action that had validity in the days of the apostolic church, but without value among Christians today.

Some individuals have promoted a “ministry of healing” through anointing.<sup>3</sup> Often, healers offer “blessed” oil for “a gift to the ministry.” They claim that when these special oils are applied to the afflicted parts (even empty wallets), they cause healing.<sup>4</sup> They offer no money-back guarantee, because if the sick person doesn’t have enough faith, the oil can’t work. It is a pretty good business that permits the sale of oil that costs a few cents to mix and bottle, which can be sold for twenty dollars or more. There are no restrictions on the effectiveness, because if it doesn’t work, it is the fault of the one using the oil and not the fault of the oil.

During the years of my walk before the Lord, I have witnessed many individuals who claim to possess the gift of healing. These individuals don’t bat a thousand; in fact, their success rate is often lower than that observed and identified as spontaneous remission. When confronted by their failures, they are often prone to say that those for whom they prayed didn’t have faith. If someone is not healed, it is their own lack of faith, and the healer is off the hook.

Other believers—undoubtedly sincere in their faith—have dismissed what James writes. It appears that those rejecting James’ words are often more concerned to react to abuse than to provide a careful exegesis of what he has written. They are more concerned not to appear to be countenancing error than to provide an accurate exegesis of the text.

An old saw presents a hermeneutic principle: any text out of context is pretext. Therefore, if we will understand what James teaches, we will need to understand the context. Then, having the context in view, we will need to examine what is actually said in **JAMES 5:13-16**.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version**, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> “Life Happens,” <http://newbeginningsbaptist.ca/clientimages/42652/sermonarchive/james513-14lifehappens.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Faith Healing & Anointing Temple, <http://fhatonthemove.com/>

<sup>4</sup> e.g. [http://www.healinglove.us/anointing\\_oils.html](http://www.healinglove.us/anointing_oils.html) or <http://www.jerusalem-gifts.com/index.html?target=holy-water-and-anointing-oil.html>

**REASONS FOR ILLNESS** — If we will understand what James is saying, we need to understand the reason for illnesses. In the ultimate analysis, all illness is the result of sin. I don't mean that we are punished because we have sinned, but I do mean that we are part of a fallen race. Sin has infected the race, proving to be the ultimate cause of illness.

Paul compels us to confront this truth when he writes in the Letter to Roman Christians, “Just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come” [**ROMANS 5:12-14**]. Illness, and ultimately death, is the result of sin.

Surely, none of us are so insensitive or obtuse in our thinking as to imagine that infants die because they have sinned. Innocent children do die. I still recall with sorrow a funeral that I conducted for a child that lived but minutes following his birth. The parents were immigrants, and as you might imagine, they were deeply grieved at the death of this long-anticipated child. The parents had approached their pastor, but he was too busy to conduct a funeral. They spoke with the associate pastor of the congregation, but he excused himself as being too busy. They approached me, heartbroken and feeling deserted in the world.

I assured them that I would be honoured to provide whatever comfort God afforded in His Word as they laid their child to rest. What can you say when a little child dies? I turned to the account of David when he grieved at the death of the child he had fathered by Bathsheba while she was still married to Uriah. The child became sick, and the illness threatened the life of the child. David fasted, refusing to eat or to attend to his appearance. However, the child died.

Pick up the account there. “On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, ‘Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us. How then can we say to him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm.’ But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, ‘Is the child dead?’ They said, ‘He is dead.’ Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, ‘What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.’”

Now, listen to this important insight David provides concerning the child. “He said, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, “Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me’” [**2 SAMUEL 12:18-23**].

This is not a statement of hopelessness or resignation; it is a statement of hope, a statement of confidence. David was not resigning himself to the inevitable, saying that he must somehow get on with his life; he was looking to a gracious God who seeks only what is good. He is anticipating the instruction that the Apostle will provide in his review of the resurrection. Paul says, “As in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” [**1 CORINTHIANS 15:22**]. “As in Adam all die”—just as all are under adamic sin and subject to death, “so also in Christ shall all be made alive”—those who die in innocence are safe in Christ. Those who are innocent and who yet die because they are part of this fallen race are kept safe in Christ. God has made provision for the innocent within this broken, sinful world, receiving them to Himself.

As an aside, those who destroy life in the womb, and even life in a Petri dish, have much to answer for. Though those innocent children who are destroyed *in utero* are safe in Christ the Lord, there is an awful accounting that will be demanded of those who kill them. Jesus said, “Whoever causes the downfall of one of these little ones who believe in Me—it would be better for him if a heavy millstone were hung around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea! Woe to the world because of offences. For offences must come, but woe to that man by whom the offence comes. If your hand or your foot causes your downfall, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or lame, than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes your downfall, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, rather than to have two eyes and be thrown into hellfire” [MATTHEW 18:6-9]!<sup>5</sup>

That is terrifying! Those who dare destroy the unborn are every bit as culpable in the eyes of the Living God as those who injure or mislead little children. In another place, Jesus is recorded as saying, “Hard trials and temptations are bound to come, but too bad for whoever brings them on! Better to wear a millstone necklace and take a swim in the deep blue sea than give even one of these dear little ones a hard time” [LUKE 17:1, 2]!<sup>6</sup>

Now, refocus on the message. The question is why do people experience sickness? James is not saying that every illness is the consequence of sin. There are consequences to our choices. If I live a sedentary life, consuming vast quantities of unhealthy foods, there are consequences. The waist will expand. Plaque builds on arterial walls, restricting blood flow. Vitality wanes. A lack of exercise and unhealthy diet combine to threaten life.

Those who choose to smoke do so knowing that they elevate the risk of various cancers. Those who drink do so knowing that they destroy brain cells and expose themselves to a myriad of risks associated with drinking. Those who use drugs recreationally do so knowing that there are health and mental consequences to their choice. Sickness can—and does—result from each of these choices, and is likely to result from each of these lifestyle choices. If you choose to live a risky lifestyle—practising homosexuality, robbing banks, driving without proper restraints—injury, sickness, and/or death is a much higher probability than before making your choice. Undoubtedly, we can apply the words of the Apostle to the case of unhealthy lifestyle choices: “The sins of some men are conspicuous” [1 TIMOTHY 5:24].

So, we can suffer sickness as result of our own poor choices in life. All of us are subject to the common illnesses of life. We are part of this fallen world, and because that is true, we are not immune to the hurts and injuries associated with this life. A stress-filled life will eventually take a toll on our health. We may well experience an increase in colds and flues, or we may find ourselves fatigued—mentally, emotionally and physically. Exposure to chemicals that are detrimental to health affect Christians the same as non-Christians. The difference is that Christians are empowered to respond differently to the sickness than are non-Christians.

Then, we age. Our first parents sinned, plunging the race into ruin. Thus, we move inexorably toward a rendezvous with death. This present life is preparation for what follows. The ageing process has associated with it the loss of vigour, strength and agility, increased susceptibility to common ailments and infections, and a general decline in health. I understand that we baby boomers don’t like to think about ageing, but we do age! And with the ageing comes the knowledge of our mortality. I have often said that the statistics on death are pretty amazing: one out of one die.

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<sup>5</sup> **Holman Christian Standard Bible** (Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville, TN 2003)

<sup>6</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, **The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language** (NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO 2002)

We acknowledge that illness can result from lifestyle choices, from susceptibility to ailments that are common to all mankind, or as result of the ageing process. However, in the text before us, James is not offering a blanket cure from these ailments. Rather, he focuses attention on illness that is the result of sin against the Master and against His people. He is not addressing illnesses that may occur in those who are not Christians. He is not even referring to illness in individuals who profess Christ but have no connection to a congregation. James is focused on illness that is the result of Divine discipline. How do we know this? Well, I'm glad you asked.

First, James has written to people who are associated with local congregations. Therefore, his instructions have no immediate application to those who have chosen not to avail themselves of the relationship to the people of God. Again, the one who is sick is instructed to "call for the elders of the church," requesting that they "pray over him." This is not a private issue, but one which involves to some degree the congregation, and therefore the elders, acting on behalf of the congregation are to intervene. Finally, the sick person has been sinning continually. Translating the latter portion of verse fifteen literally, it reads, "If he has been sinning." James is not saying that prayer on behalf of the sick has no value, but in this instance, specific individuals are called for a specific purpose because of a specific situation.

It should be obvious that the individual calling for the elders is very sick. In fact, the word that James uses speaks of illness that could lead to death. The word means "weak," "debilitated," or "without strength"; and the fact that this condition has progressed to a point that it is necessary to call for the elders indicates that it is a serious matter. The word James uses to describe the sick person is used on various other occasions in the Bible, and a review of some of those instances will give us some understanding of serious nature of this particular illness.

In John's Gospel, we read an account informing of a time that Jesus healed a child. The text informs us that Jesus "came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was *ill*." Here we encounter the same word James used. John continues with his account of Jesus' service to this official. "When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was *at the point of death*" [JOHN 4:46, 47]. The illness had brought the boy to "the point of death."

Similarly, Paul wrote the Philippians that Epaphroditus "has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was *ill*. Indeed he was *ill, near to death*. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow" [PHILIPPIANS 2:26, 27]. Again, the word used to describe Epaphroditus' illness is the same word James uses, clearly describing Epaphroditus as one who is sick and "near to death."

The word can be applied to people who had died as result of illness, as in the case of Lazarus. "Now a certain man was *ill*, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was *ill*. So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is *ill*.' But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This *illness* does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.'

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was *ill*, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was" [JOHN 11:1-6]. Jesus wasn't dismissing the fact that Lazarus was ill; He knew that Lazarus would die and what He would do. Of course, Lazarus' illness did lead to his death, just as did the illness which took the life of Tabitha. Luke describes her illness by writing, "In those days [Tabitha] became *ill* and died" [ACTS 9:37]. The word indicates a debilitating illness that can be life threatening.

James describes an individual who is desperately ill, but it should be obvious as you read what he has written that the individual is suffering as result of unconfessed sin. This is a practical example of what Paul describes in **1 CORINTHIANS 11:29, 30**. There, he describes people who participated at the Lord's Table without discerning the Body of Christ. Therefore, among the Corinthian Christians were many who were weak [the same word James uses] and ill, and some who had even died as result of their arrogance before the Lord.

This is the reason James says to call the elders; and it is also the reason he says that the prayer of faith will raise up the sick individual after confessing his sin and receiving forgiveness from the Master. James describes an individual who is sick as result of divine discipline administered because of unconfessed sin. The individual who is sick is in need of forgiveness [**JAMES 5:15b, 16**]; she needs to confess her sin and forsake it so she can be restored to fellowship with the Master. Because the illness has to some degree involved the community of faith, the one who is sick is to call for the elders who are to act on behalf of the congregation.

Ultimately, all illness is because of sin. We are fallen creatures living in the midst of a fallen world. We bear the marks of sin and suffer because of the sin that has contaminated the world in which we live. Thus, we are susceptible to illness and weakness and death. However, James is focused on sin that has resulted in discipline administered by the Father.

For a brief moment I want to consider this business of discipline before I continue with the message. Because we enjoy this divine relationship, we can anticipate discipline. We read, "Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?"

"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor be weary when reproved by him.  
For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives."

"It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" [**HEBREWS 12:5-11**].

When God disciplines, it is to turn us from presumptuous sin and to return us to fellowship with the Master. God's discipline always has the goal of restoring fellowship as we turn from sin and return to a walk with the Master. God's discipline is designed to turn us. Knowing what is right, though we are doing what is wrong, creates internal stress and unhappiness. First, God may remove what we imagine brings us the greatest joy, so that we return to Him who is our true joy.

If the loss of things, or even the removal of friends and family whom we love, fails to grip our attention, God will wound our conscience, creating great stress and loss of pleasure. This is the situation Lot experienced while living in Sodom. The Lord "rescued righteous Lot," who was "greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked." Then we are informed that as a "righteous man [he] lived among them day after day ... tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard" [**2 PETER 2:7, 8**].

If the torment of a wounded conscience fails to turn us from the mad pursuit of our own desire and away from God, He is prepared to exercise His ultimate discipline. This severe mercy is addressed in Scripture. James speaks of God's final discipline designed to keep us from destroying ourselves. "My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins" [JAMES 5:19, 20].

John addresses this same issue of divine discipline when he advises believers, "If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death" [1 JOHN 5:16, 17].

The sick individual whom James has in view is obviously one who is under discipline. The person has experienced God's severe mercy. Now, he is prepared to turn from the pursuit of his own forwardness. So, he is instructed to call for the elders of the church. For restoration, he will confess his sin, since he is unable to come before the congregation to do so, and the elders will pray for him, asking God to be merciful.

The condition of appointing the elders to pray for the penitent is similar to the requirement that Job pray for his friends after God revealed Himself to them. "The LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: 'My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has. Now therefore take seven bulls and seven rams and go to my servant Job and offer up a burnt offering for yourselves. And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept his prayer not to deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.' So Eliphaz the Temanite and Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went and did what the LORD had told them, and the LORD accepted Job's prayer" [JOB 42:7-9].

**RESPONDING TO ILLNESS** — It is fascinating to note that the sick person is responsible to call for the elders. This is so different from contemporary culture, where the elders are expected to know who is sick and take the initiative to visit every sick person. Here, there is no hint that the elders must offer intervention; it is not the elders who have sinned—it is the individual who is now sick! Therefore, the sick person must ask for the elders. It is a tacit acknowledgement of her sin—a first step toward repentance, if you will. What a novel concept! The initiative for healing comes from the sick person, and not from the elders.

There seems to be two extreme responses advocated by people appealing to this particular passage of the Word. Some have decided that God will always heal the sick if they are anointed with oil. However, that is not likely correct. Paul certainly healed some people, but not always. He advised Timothy to avoid letting himself get into a state that could lead to illness. "No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments" [1 TIMOTHY 5:23]. Likewise, he spoke of leaving one colleague behind because of illness. "I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus" [2 TIMOTHY 4:20].

It is pertinent to note that there is not a single instance in Acts or in the Epistles of an Apostle healing through anointing. James stands alone in requiring anointing. If this were a common means of healing, then we would anticipate seeing it elsewhere. The Apostles healed with prayer save when Jesus sent them throughout Judea by [MARK 6:13]. Jesus anointed with mud made from spittle and with water from the pool of Siloam, but we do not imagine that mud and spittle are instruments of healing, thus making them into necessary instruments of healing.

Our Catholic friends created “extreme unction” as a sacrament. Today, Catholic theologians avoid speaking of extreme unction, choosing rather to speak of what they call the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick.<sup>7</sup> What James does not describe is a rite that is even remotely akin to extreme unction. Extreme unction is a rite that must be administered by priests of the Roman Catholic Church, though it *may* be administered by bishops. The holy oil of chrism must be blessed by a bishop.<sup>8</sup> The novel sacrament is generally understood to be reserved for those at the point of death; however, James does not ask, “Is anyone sick to the point of death.” The individual may be that ill, but the instruction is not restricted to those at the point of death.

The rite of extreme unction did not receive official recognition by any church until more than eight centuries after James wrote his missive! It is important to note that James is advocating anointing leading to a cure, not an anointing as preparation for death, as has long been the understood purpose of the Catholic sacrament. So, there are two extreme views, neither of which fit with Scripture. Instead, the Word of God is dealing with a Christian under divine discipline, and in whom the discipline has proven effective.

When sick, the first need is for the sick person to seek to be healed. If the illness is not of the common variety that will run its course, or if there are exceptional aspects to the illness, consult a physician. Physicians and the surgeons should be seen as gifts from God. An ancient text advises, “My son, in thy sickness be not negligent: but pray unto the Lord, and he will make thee whole. Leave off from sin, and order thine hands aright, and cleanse thy heart from all wickedness. Give a sweet savour, and a memorial of fine flour; and make a fat offering, as not being. Then give place to the physician, for the Lord hath created him: let him not go from thee, for thou hast need of him. There is a time when in their hands there is good success. For they shall also pray unto the Lord, that he would prosper that, which they give for ease and remedy to prolong life. He that sinneth before his Maker, let him fall into the hand of the physician” [ECCLESIASTICUS 38:9-15].<sup>9</sup>

I do not say that one should not pray. In fact, it is appropriate to pray, asking the Great Physician to give health. There is nothing wrong with asking others to join in asking the Master to raise you up when you are sick, and it is a demonstration of the compassion of Christ that Christian communities unite in praying for those who are ill. The Lord has often heard the requests of His people and shown His great mercy; and He will undoubtedly do so again.

However, what is not warranted is attempting to wrest this particular Scripture to say something that it does not say. There is no guarantee of healing to be found in these words. Neither is there an obscure ritual hidden within. Nor should anyone expect that the symbol communicated through the oil will become the means God uses to heal one who is ill. The oil is a symbol, and it is “the prayer of faith” that is used to raise up the sick person. This is offered in conjunction with the confession of sin and a plea for restoration.

**RECOVERING FROM ILLNESS** — God is gracious to His people. Who knows whether the Master will give healing in a given situation or whether He will be glorified through giving strength to endure the condition. Many of the saints of God have suffered terribly, and God was glorified in their response to illness and to sorrow. What is evident from even a cursory reading of the Word is that God stands with His people whatever the situation they are called to endure.

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<sup>7</sup> Stuart P. Garver, **Watch Your Teaching** (Christ’s Mission, Inc., Hackensack NJ 1973) 162

<sup>8</sup> Josef Neuner and Heinrich Roos, Karl Rahner (ed.), **The Teaching of the Catholic Church** (Alba House, Staten Island, NY 1965, 1967) 331-8

<sup>9</sup> **The Apocrypha: King James Version** (Logos Research Systems, Bellingham WA 1995)

As an aside, Jesus promised, “I am with you always” [MATTHEW 28:20b]. Either that is a true statement or it is false. Simply because I experience illness or difficulty does not prove that I am forsaken. God has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” [HEBREWS 13:5b]. Again, either this is a true statement or it is false. Because God is true, because each of us can testify to His faithfulness, we can be assured that regardless of what we may feel, God is with us in every condition, and that includes illness.

Before the three Hebrew children were thrown into the fiery furnace, they asserted their confidence that God was able to deliver them [DANIEL 3:17]; they were determined to serve God whatever the cost. After they were thrown into the furnace, the king witnessed four men walking around in the fire, and the fourth had the appearance of “a son of the gods” [DANIEL 3:25]. Few of us know what it is to be delivered through fire. However, the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is the same God who will stand with us in our time of fiery trial.

It is possible, however, that in our stubbornness we may pursue our own desires, disregarding the will of the Father. Then, when we are corrected, we may become more stubborn still, leading to the condition that James describes. Should that happen, or should it be that we know of a brother or sister who is brought low because of presumptuous sin, we will do well to recall the instruction our brother James has given in this text.

The first thing to do is to call for the elders of the church. The mere fact that the sinner calls for the elders will be an indication that she has begun the process of repentance and seeking restoration to fellowship. When the elders come to her bedside, she must be prepared to confess her sin as they anoint her with oil and pray for her. Their intercession, especially if she has confessed her sin, will undoubtedly remind the Master of her sin and of His promise to restore those who are penitent. Then, she can anticipate that God will honour His Word.

He has given us His promise that the prayer of faith will raise up the sick one. The conditions demand repentance as expressed through confession of sin as we seek restoration. How much better to avoid the situation than to apply the promise that we are given here! Nevertheless, it is possible that we witness someone drifting from pursuing hard after God. Because we love Him, and because we have compassion for those who are drifting, we will warn the errant ones of the consequences of their actions. We will pray, asking God to be merciful and asking that He will turn them from their dangerous drift. Should they be brought to the point of repentance, we will continue to show compassion, urging them to seek forgiveness and restoration. We will do this, knowing that the prayer of faith will be used to raise them up.

What is the “prayer of faith,” you may ask. The prayer of faith is that prayer which is offered when we *know* that God will answer. It is that prayer which is described by John in his first letter. “This is the confidence that we have toward Him, that if we ask anything according to His will He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of Him” [1 JOHN 5:14, 15].

There are some practical lessons from this section that we must not overlook. First, disobedience can lead to sickness. This was David’s experience when he tried to hide his sins [see PSALM 32]. He relates that he attempted to remain silent, only to see his bones waste away. He speaks of his strength being dried up as the hand of the Lord lay heavy on him [PSALM 32:3, 4]. Again, sin affects the whole church. We can never sin alone, for sin has a way of growing and infecting others. The sick person is instructed to confess his sins to the elders, who act on behalf of the church. The reason for this is that the sick individual has sinned against the church. Yet again, know that there is healing (physical and spiritual) when sin is dealt with.



“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,  
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”

[PROVERBS 28:13]

There is one last point that is necessary for the sake of completeness in this message. The “confessing” that James writes about is to be done among the saints. He was not suggesting confessing our sins to a preacher or priest. We confess our sins first of all to the Lord, but we must also confess them to those who have been affected by them. It is an axiom of the Faith that *we must never confess sin beyond the circle of that sin’s influence*. Private sin requires private confession; public sin requires public confession. It is wrong for Christians to “let it all hang out” in public, for such “confessing” can do more harm than the original sin.

Have you begun to drift? The Word of God calls each Christian to seek His forgiveness. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” [1 JOHN 1:9]. Is there someone whom you have harmed, whether deliberately or inadvertently? Make things right. Do what honours God; let us build one another in this most holy Faith. May God keep us from sin and cause us to walk according to His will. Amen.