

“Spiritual Maturity: Connection with God by Wrestling in Prayer”**James 5:13-18 (NAS)**

- 13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.
- 14 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;
- 15 and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will have forgiven him.
- 16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.
- 17 Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months.
- 18 And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

These 6 verses are full of encouragement to connect with God in PRAYER – pray when you are hurting, pray when you are doing great, pray when you are sick and pray when you are in sin. Pray for yourself and pray for one another. Prayer is powerful!

Prayer is the intimate “dance” of communion with God in the inner man.

√ It is to be continual (1 Thess. 5:18), persistent (Luke 11: 8-10) and confident (Hebrew 4:16, 1 John 5:14-15).

√ It includes praising (Psalm 106:1), asking (Matthew 7:7) and confessing (1 John 1:9) but is also a running conversation with God.

In one sense, these 6 verses are straightforward: PRAY

However, these 6 verses evoke much difference in practical interpretation.

Are we to call for the church elders every time we are sick?

Is anointing with oil to be a regular part of our church practice?

Is it God’s will that all sickness be healed?

If we follow James’ instruction are we to expect healing all the time?

Are we to confess all our sins to one another?

Should our faith expect results such as Elijah saw?

POINT #1

We must “wrestle” with God in prayer. When we do, God allows us to prevail.

(Genesis 32: 24-30 – account of Jacob wrestling with God all night)

√ Jacob was a “supplanter” – know for forcing his own way

√ One night, Jacob wrestled with God – probably over how to handle the coming encounter with his brother, Esau.

√ God weakened Jacob’s supplanting spirit by dislocating his thigh

- √ Jacob would not “let go” in prayer until God blessed him
- √ God changed his name (and personality) to “striver with God” (Israel) and allowed Jacob to “prevail” (be the winner)

POINT #2

Suffering or joy should both drive us to God. (James 5:13)

Hebrews 4:16 Let us therefore draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.

Colossians 3:16 ... singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Bad times could make us resentful to God and good times could make us forgetful of God. May we guard against this and be DRAWN to God in prayer.

POINT #3

Sin and sickness should drive us to God. (James 5:14-16)

Note: Most sickness is NOT the result of sin (John 9:3)

√ “Sick” in v.14 is “asqenew” which emphasizes spiritual weariness. With physical symptoms of weakness and exhaustion.

√ This “anyone” is likely one who might not physically be able to make it to service and senses that the cause of sickness might be spiritual.

√ Note that it is up to the one who is sick to call for the “elders” (not a specific board, but the spiritually elder and leaders/pastors of the local church) to gather to pray – both for physical healing and more, for spiritual healing and forgiveness.

√ The word for spiritual/religious anointing is “creein” – not used in v. 14

Here, the word is “aliepein” used for the mundane anointing associated with medicine.

J. Vernon McGee says that this means we are to call for the spiritual leaders to pray and call for the best doctor to treat us.

√ Although actual “oil” is often associated with physical healing in the N.T., it is more often a symbol for the Holy Spirit, needed for spiritual healing. Therefore, although actual oil might be administered as a sign, the emphasis is on the anointing with the balm of the Holy Spirit.

√ The emphasis in v. 15-16 is on spiritual healing and forgiveness, leading us to favor a similar emphasis indicated in v. 14.

POINT #4

We must believe God for great things in prayer.

Practical Application:

1. If I am physically sick, I should ask the spiritually mature of my church to pray for my healing.
2. If I sense that my sin might be a cause of my illness I should call for leaders to pray over me for my forgiveness and restoration. Oil may be used as a symbol, but it is the anointing of the Holy Spirit that I need.

3. It is appropriate to seek a doctor to help me in my healing.
4. I may not be healed of my physical illness (God' will be done) but I will always be healed of my spiritual ailment.
5. I am to confess my sins to God (1 John 1:9), not to men. But I am to confess my "faults" (v. 16) – meaning those sins in which I have specifically injured others – to those who have been injured. This is when spiritual healing will surely come.
6. I must always believe that fervent prayers of those made righteous by God will make a significant difference.
7. My prayers are not about me changing the mind of God in heaven, but about God changing the minds and course of men on earth. "Prayer changes things."
Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

In Answer to My Questions Raised Earlier

Are we to call for the church elders every time we are sick?

Yes, we should ask prayer, but asking for a special gathering of leaders is to be reserved for times of spiritual languishing.

Is anointing with oil to be a regular part of our church practice?

Not necessarily. Oil refers to calling on the Holy Spirit and to doctoring.

Is it God's will that all sickness be healed?

Definitely no. God heals many and chooses not to heal others.

If we follow James' instruction are we to expect healing all the time?

Physically – no. Spiritually – yes.

Are we to confess all our sins to one another?

No – only those sins ("faults") that have injured another.

Should our faith expect results such as Elijah saw?

Yes – great things! though we probably won't stop and start the rain.

Answered prayer is all about God's will in the matter. (1 John 5:14-15)