

The Healing Power of the Prayer of Faith Pt. 2

Epistle of James
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Please turn with me in your Bibles to the fifth chapter of James, James 5. We're looking this morning again at a passage we began to look at last week, that is verses 14 and 15, and the subject the prayer of faith. We titled the message last time and this is the same title this time, "The Healing Power of the Prayer of Faith." The healing power of the prayer of faith, this is part 2. We began looking at this, as I said, last Sunday. This is a controversial text and passage. It's one with a variety of different perspectives and I encourage you to search the Scriptures and see if what you hear from me seems to match up with the word as always, especially when it's a more controversial area. Most people take this as referring to physical healing but a number see it, as I've shared with you, I think the main focus is spiritual healing. I'm not saying that there is not, physical healing is not a part of it but it's secondary. The primary focus is spiritual healing in the passage.

Let me read the text together and we'll pray and then begin to unpack this a little further this morning. Let's read verses 13 to 18 of James 5.

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to 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 be 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 Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit.

Let's pray together.

Father, we ask now as we open Your word that You might open the eyes of our hearts to see and understand wonderful things from Your law that we might in Your light see light

and we might be transformed into the image of Your Son the Lord Jesus and we pray in His name. Amen.

The healing power of the prayer of faith. The question hinges on what is the focus and as I shared last time, I believe it's spiritual healing is what he's promising and there are three basic reasons that I posed for you to consider last time. First, the words that are used for "sick" in verse 14 and in verse 15, "Is anyone among you sick?" James 5:14, the word is translated more than half the times it's used in the New Testament as "weak" and it can certainly mean weak, it can mean sick as well but the idea, the essential base meaning of the word is to be without strength, and so that can certainly happen when you're also physically without strength, sick, you become spiritually without strength. The second word when he says in verse 15, "will restore the one who is sick," is a word which basically means to be exhausted from labor. So those two words allow the possibility of it being more about spiritual weakness than physical weakness that the Lord is promising to heal.

To me even more compelling than that, though, is the unqualified blessings that are promised in verse 15. These are three powerful blessings that are given without qualification. This is going to happen. Look what he says, "the prayer offered in faith," first, "will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him." The threefold promise of restoration is compelling and I think illustrates the fact that he's talking about spiritual blessings because it's not always God's will to raise someone up from their sickbed. It is God's appointed, he's appointed it for each of us a time to die and there are times when we are sick and people die. It's not always God's will to heal every physical sickness but it is always his will to heal every spiritual weakness and sickness.

And even more compelling than that is the context, the book of James itself, and James's emphasis not upon natural blessings and natural circumstantial blessings of God but the fact that James seems to assume that life is hard and that we shouldn't expect it not to be. We talked about how in chapter 1, verses 2 to 4, he begins by saying, "Count it all joy when you encounter various trials, and don't count it joy because then you can now be delivered from that trial and have it removed from your life. No, count it joy because God will use the trial and the suffering to perfect your faith. He will grant you endurance and give you all kinds of spiritual blessings by allowing you to remain in the trial." Then even more than that in chapter 5, the verses immediately preceding this, verses 13 to 18 on prayer, have been talking about the tremendous trials that were being experienced by those to whom he wrote. He was writing to poor, basically poor Jewish believers who were experiencing social injustice and oppression. They were being oppressed by the wealthy around them and so in James 5:1 to 6, James speaks directly to those wealthy oppressors, ungodly oppressors, and tells them judgment is coming for them, and then in verses 7 to 11, he says, "This is how you as Christians deal with social injustice and oppression, you seek patience and you seek endurance. You walk with the Lord and allow him to help you endure and bear up under those things. You don't look for the change of your circumstances, you don't fight for the change of your circumstances, you fight to be holy and to trust yourself to God and to endure."

So he flows right out of that then into this discussion of healing and to me it seems incredibly disjunctive and uncharacteristic to assume he's promising and he's mainly talking about physical healing from illness. It doesn't fit the context of the book of James. It doesn't fit the New Testament. I mean, I think when you really look at the flow of Scripture as a whole, what you see is the Bible from Genesis to Revelation is trying to unveil for us who God is and who we are and what our problems are, and our problems are not merely the physical problems and this becomes clearer and clearer as you go from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The outward, this is essentially something you see, the outward and external emphasis the Old Testament is shadowing what's really important is the inward and spiritual. You see it in a number of ways, I mean, things like the dietary laws that pass away because they weren't really, it's not really about what you eat that affects you, it's what comes out of your heart. Circumcision, the rite of inclusion in the covenant is not really about the physical act, it's about the spiritual act of having your heart changed, circumcised hearts is what God is dealing with.

So our problems are spiritual and Jesus' healing ministry even, he healed, I mean, you read the New Testament, I was reading in Mark this week and you see he healed everybody that's coming for healing basically. I mean, when they come for healing and their hearts are right, he heals them, and that's awesome but it's not just about the physical blessing. It wasn't just that he came for three, three and half years ministered grace and healing to all these people who were sick to extend their lives physically so they could die then 10, 20, 30, 40 years later. The healing was a sign of the spiritual need of the people. The physical brokenness was symptomatic of spiritual brokenness and so when Jesus healed the man born blind, he was teaching that the problem is spiritual blindness, you're all born spiritually blind, it's a sign, John makes this clear in John 8 and John 9 because he says Jesus said, "I am the light of the world," then he heals a man born spiritually blind.

It's evident most clearly in John's Gospel, in fact, when you read John 6 to show you again the physical takes second place to the spiritual, when Jesus feeds the 5,000 in John 6:1 to 14. You know, five loaves, two fish, he feeds 5,000 men plus women and children, probably upwards of 20,000 people eat, and these five loaves weren't big loaves, they were probably little loaves like this, like five rolls and two fish, he feeds 20,000 people. They are all satisfied. They took up 12 baskets of leftovers. The next day the people come out, Jesus sends them away, the disciples he sends, he walks on the water, then they find in the next day, the crowds find him and they're interested in one thing, they want bread, and you read the account in John 6, they're basically baiting him into doing it again. He says, "I'm telling you that you didn't come to Me because you really understood the sign, you want the physical blessing, and I'm telling you don't look for the physical blessing, look for the spiritual blessing." And they say, "Well, listen, show us a sign that we can really believe You. Hey, we have a suggestion, Moses gave the people bread from heaven, we want some more bread," and Jesus said basically, "I'm not giving you bread. I am the bread of life. He who believes in Me will never die, will never hunger." So the point that, "I gave you the bread was to show you your spiritual need, that you are spiritually impoverished and you need Christ. You need who I am and what I've done and

My bread is to die on the cross for you and you will be satisfied when you put your faith in Me and trust Me you will have the deep needs of your soul satisfied. If I merely give you bread again and just satisfy your stomachs, you still die and go to hell."

So the physical miracles were pointing to the spiritual miracles and so James is all focused about spiritually following Christ. Live out your faith. Life is hard, live out your faith, so he's not giving us a name it, claim it verse that we, you know, name it, claim it, frame it, put it up on the wall. Every time you're sick, if you have enough faith you can be made well. It's just not what the Bible is teaching, inconsistent with the whole of Scripture, inconsistent with what James is talking about. What he is teaching is that God will heal you spiritually; that even as your outer man is wasting away, as Paul says, a beautiful picture in 2 Corinthians 4, he talks about all the afflictions that we experience and he doesn't say that I'm trying to overcome my afflictions by just, you know, like you hear on the preachers on TV, cable TV, you know, you sort of speak the word, you name it and then God does it. You drive the illness away, drive the, look at your wallet and say, "Money, be there!" Some guy I heard said something like that, you know, just look at your wallet and command it to have money in it. I'd like to see who really had that happen. I'd just like to know if anybody had that happen. I don't believe so.

But that's just not the character of the Scriptures and certainly not what James is talking about. He's saying, listen, he understands that people go through real painful circumstances and when we do that, what do we do? And if we seek God, we will experience his spiritual blessings, and so like I was saying with the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Paul talks about all the afflictions he goes through and he says, "In these momentary light afflictions are producing for us a weight of glory far beyond all comparison. I'm not so concerned about getting rid of the weighty burdens, "that he then calls momentary and light, when you look at what he's talking about, it doesn't look momentary and light but he says relatively speaking it is, but he says, "As the outer man decays, the inner man is being renewed day by day and it is the Christian mindset to prize the inner man being renewed." That's the goal. Secondary to that, the outer man, and when we have that priority right, then we can understand that I do think that he's telling us that sometimes you will be healed physically too. I'm not saying it doesn't happen and I'm not saying we don't ask for it. We ask for it, it's appropriate, but we ask even more than the physical healing, we ask for the spiritual healing and for the furtherance of your kingdom. We say it like Jesus said, "Not My will but Your will be done," and that's the balance.

So we said that last time and we talked about the occasion, the nature of the need for the prayer of faith being spiritual, the occasion could be very often will be when you are physically sick, you get weak spiritually, just the affliction and weight of being ill overwhelms us in our weakness, presses in on the soul. I mean, we're connection between body and soul and your body and soul are connected in ways we don't fully understand and so it does weigh upon you and it's appropriate, then, to call for the elders of the church. Today I want to take the next two points having considered that last time, but today we have two points this morning. The healing power of the prayer of faith part 2, the first point is the practice of the prayer of faith. The practice of the prayer of faith. In

this we're basically answering the question what is done after the call is made for the elders of the church? The request for help has come, what are the elders to do? What does the text tell us?

Now just before I start into that, I remind you that this is saying that we when we are in need, when we feel weak, we should call. It's on us to humble ourselves and ask for help, to call for the elders of the church. It's appropriate to do that. When you're about to go into an illness, it's not that you want to show everybody that you, "Hey, I'm going to be up for this. I'm going to be able to deal with this. I don't need your prayer." No, it would be wise to pray, "Pray for me. Pray for me. Come and pray for me, anoint me before I have this surgery because I'm not sure how I'm going to do as I work through this." I know I struggle. I know for me if I'm going through something, I'm going to have you anoint me and pray because I know how weak I when I don't feel well. I struggle. Some people have a higher tolerance for pain than others. I'm not one of those people. My wife and my daughter and my son all have greater tolerance for pain than I do. You know, I might think I have a headache, maybe I should take four aspirin or something, you know? I'm trying to be better about that, but anyway you know what I'm saying. But it's not pride to, I mean, we don't want to walk in pride, we want to humble ourselves and say, "Pray for me." It's appropriate to do that and it's not just physical illness though, we're saying you may find yourself just discouraged, maybe you're going through a time in your life where just you're spiritually depressed, call for the elders of the church to pray for you so that the call goes out.

Now we're actually to this point. That was a little bit of introduction to this point. The second point, I mean the first point, the practice of the prayer of faith. There are basically four things I think the text says that the elders are supposed to do. So the practice of the prayer of faith, four subpoints.

The first thing the elders are to do is to go. Implicit in the text, you call for the elders of the church, they are to pray, they go. I think this basically says when someone is down and they need someone to come to them often, like I said, they are maybe physically incapacitated as well, they're asking for the elders to come. So the elders meet with the person, they go.

Now let me just make a little side point here. This shows how the New Testament assumes – listen to this – the New Testament assumes that if you are a Christian you are connected to a defined local church. Do you see that? If you are weak, call for the elders of the church, of your church. There are some people who say it doesn't matter if you're connected to the church, that it's just you and the Lord Jesus or you and the people at the coffee shop, you and the people in your life, you and your family. No, the Bible assumes that Christians are connected to churches, that we need to be under spiritual authority. We need to have elders who are shepherding us. It's true for all of us as elders at the church. We have seven men who are serving as active elders right now and the reality is that I'm under the other six guys and their authority. I need them shepherding me and the same is true, we all need spiritual shepherding and its implicit in this verse.

You know, an elder, there are three different words that New Testament uses for the office of elder, the one word is "elder" which translates the Greek word "presbuteros" which means, the etymology is from the gray-headed, it means maturity, older, spiritually more mature. So the elders, the other two words though, the second word is "overseer," sometimes translated "bishop," but over literally is, overseer and it means those who manage and watch over as stewards of the church. The third word is the word "shepherd." Our word "pastor" basically is the same as "shepherd," Latin word for shepherd is pastor. That's why we have the word "pastor" in our language. It really means shepherd. So elder equals overseer equals shepherds, one office. So he says call for that, those leaders in the church that have been set apart in that way to pray. So they go.

The second thing they do, the second subpoint under the practice of the prayer of faith is they anoint. He says, "they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord." The participle "anointing him" actually is in a past aorist tense which means "having anointed him with oil." So it's like they anoint him with oil before they pray, before they exercise the prayer of faith, and I think in one sense it's not that there's just step 1, step 2, step 3, step 4, in one sense prayer undergirds the whole thing. I mean, I think the best way to actually do this is to anoint and pray at the beginning for the Lord's blessing upon this time. It's not a quick, "Hey, you called for the elders of the church, here we anoint you, we pray over you, then we're gone. Three minutes, we're out of here. We prayed." I don't think that is what this is talking about. This is talking about something much more extensive than that.

Now sometimes it may be more or less time but the anointing, what's the purpose of the anointing? Well, the idea in the word here translated, it means the physical act of pouring oil, putting oil on someone, and this is the only place in the New Testament other, well, there's one other place where we speak of anointing people with oil and that's Mark 6:13 where the disciples when they were sent out, the 12 were sent out, they anointed the sick with oil and prayed for them. So the question is what's the purpose of the anointing? Some point out that in the first century oil was used medicinally more so than today. I mean, it's used a little bit that way today, you rub oil on yourself, you've got some kind of wound or something, but in that day especially oil was medicinal, but this doesn't seem to be the purpose here because what have the elders got, what business have the elders to do with practicing medicine? When you look at the context of Scripture, I think it's clear here the anointing is not about the practical benefits of oil, it's not like, hey, essential oils, the elders come with their list of essential oils and we're going to get you well. I like what Tim Hawkins says, the only essential oil is that oil they have in the vat at Chick-fil-A. That's the only essential oil.

So it's not about the oil itself, it's about the symbolism of the oil, the spiritual significance because it's a spiritual need, and when we set it in context of the whole of Scripture, anointing with oil is a very rich and meaningful act. To be anointed with oil is to be set apart unto the Lord. So what's happening when the anointing happens is the elders as God's representatives leading the church are setting apart the believer who has called for prayer, they're setting him apart unto the Lord for God's special activity and ministry. Even more than that, though, it's not just for God's special notice of this person to meet

their spiritual needs and possibly their physical needs as well, but it's not just that, the richer picture of anointing in the Old Testament is to be anointed with oil was to be set apart for ministry and for the work that God has called you to.

In fact, the first place we encounter it, turn with me to Exodus 30, this idea of ceremonial anointing is something that we see a lot in particularly the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, related to the worship of Yahweh, and oil, there was a special anointing oil made to set things apart unto God. Chapter 30, verse 25, after he gives in verses 23 and 24 a recipe, God gives a recipe for an anointing oil, then he says in verse 25, "You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil." Now what is the anointing oil for? Look at verse 26, "With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand." So you're going to anoint everything that's going to be used, the tent of meeting itself and all the things that are associated with the worship of God where God meets man, the tent of meeting.

But he goes on, verse 29, "You shall also consecrate them," that is, these things that are anointed, they are consecrated, they are separated, "that they may be most holy; whatever touches them shall be holy." These things, some of these utensils that it's like forks and things like that, spoons, you know, you have other forks, others spoons, but these spoons, these forks are set apart for the work, for the use of God and the work of God. You don't use your cereal spoon to dip oil out or to dip incense out. You use the spoon that God has designated for worship.

He goes on to say it's not just for things, it's also for people. Verse 30, "You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me." You will also anoint Aaron, the high priest, and his sons, all of the priests must be anointed. "So you put oil on them and this separates them apart from the rest of the congregation of people to be those who will minister in My name in My house."

You see it again in chapter 40 when Moses finishes this work. In chapter 40 God reminds him to do, about Aaron in verse 12 to 15, chapter 40 of Exodus, "Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the tent of meeting and wash them with water." This is they're about to enter into their office for the first time, the tent of meeting is completed, all the things that God has told him to build have been completed and now he says, "Now bring Aaron. Wash them with water. You shall put the holy garments on Aaron and anoint him and consecrate him, that he may minister as a priest to Me. You shall bring his sons and put tunics on them; and you shall anoint them even as you have anointed their father," why? "That they may minister as priests to Me; and their anointing will qualify them for a perpetual priesthood throughout their generations." The anointing must be there to qualify them for ministry.

It wasn't just the priests that were anointed, though, the kings were anointed. In fact as you read through the Old Testament, this was true in other nations as well, they would anoint the king. They recognized that the king was set apart unto God in a special way. In

fact, it became basically another way of saying king was to say the Lord's anointed. Remember David says, "I will not lift my hand against the Lord's anointed. I'm not going to do anything against Saul because he is the Lord's anointed. He's received the anointing oil." When you look at 1 Samuel 10:1, you see Saul is anointed, "Then Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it on his head," this is speaking of Saul, "kissed him and said, 'Has not the LORD anointed you a ruler over His inheritance?'" The anointing of oil symbolized God has chosen him, set him apart.

You see the same thing in chapter 15, verse 17, when the Lord is angry with Saul for his failure, Samuel speaks to him and says in 1 Samuel 15:17, "Is it not true, though you were little in your own eyes, you were made the head of the tribes of Israel? And the LORD anointed you king over Israel." Now anointing, it meant to separate, to consecrate, but it didn't just mean that, it also meant to empower, that the anointing empowered one for ministry. You see this when you look at David's anointing. In chapter 16, Samuel is sent by the Lord because Saul has now been rejected by God because he has failed to walk with the Lord. Samuel is told by the Lord in chapter 16, verse 1, "Now the LORD said to Samuel, 'How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons.'" Go to Bethlehem, find Jesse, one of his sons is going to be king, and take the flask of oil with you, the anointing oil to anoint him.

So look at verse 6, this is after he gets there, he tells them why he's come, he brings his sons in in front of him and, "When they entered," Samuel, verse 6, "When they entered, he looked at Eliab and thought, 'Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him.'" He saw this guy walk in and he said, "That's the Lord's anointed." Look what the Lord said, verse 7, "But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.' Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, 'The LORD has not chosen this one either.' Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, 'The LORD has not chosen this one either.' Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, 'The LORD has not chosen these.'" He brought all seven of his sons before him. "And Samuel said to Jesse, 'Are these all the children?' And he said, 'There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep.' Then Samuel said to Jesse, 'Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.'" Go get him right away and look what it says next and look what happens when he receives the anointing. Verse 12, "So he sent and brought him in," this is David, "Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, 'Arise, anoint him; for this is he.' Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers," and look what happens, "and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah." The Spirit of the Lord, the anointing precedes the giving of the Spirit. The anointing is setting apart for the empowerment. So it's to set apart and it's to empower for ministry.

The prophets also were anointed not quite as often in the Old Testament as the other offices, but you see it in 1 Kings 19:16. Elijah is told by the Lord, "Go and anoint Hazael king of the Assyrians and anoint Elisha, your replacement. After you die, Elisha is going to be after you are taken up to heaven," I mean, "Elisha is going to be prophet in your place." In Isaiah 61:1, in fact Isaiah 61:1 is a prophecy of the Lord Jesus and it speaks of his being anointed as a prophet. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, Because the LORD has anointed me To bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to captives And freedom to prisoners; To proclaim the favorable year of the LORD." He quotes that in Nazareth when he preaches there. "This is fulfilled in your hearing. But the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed Me."

So when you anoint, that sets apart not just for special care to heal, you see, this shows that the purpose of the anointing is to get the person engaged in the work God has called him to. It's counterintuitive. "Wait a minute, I've got an affliction. I've got a disease. They say that I've got to have all of these different kinds of treatments. I need help and support." Yes, you do need help and support for the work that God has called you to. You see, that's what the point is, it's so that we might serve the Lord well in the affliction. Possibly he's going to heal us. Yes, it's possible but if that's the case, even that needs to be his work for his glory, not for our convenience and our happiness, not merely that. That's not why God heals someone physically, he heals someone physically to one of two things, to show his glory, that the doctors can't explain it and then you can say, "Listen, the Lord has done it." Bear testimony to that. You can tell people about what God has done for you. But the second reason is so that you might be empowered for even more ministry. If you're ill and you're about to die and the Lord lengthens your life, what are you going to do with the rest of that time, just have a great party for the rest of your life? "I've got 10 more years, and I'm going to just do all I can to enjoy life, to suck the marrow out of life, this physical life." No, if God has healed you, it's so that you might suck the real marrow out of life spiritually and you might serve him and give yourself to his work even more fully.

So the anointing is setting them apart for God's special attention and also for his empowerment so that we might be able to do the work. Now that brings us to the third point. So we've said the elders go, they anoint, thirdly, they counsel. Now we have to observe the text carefully and kind of infer this out but I think it's clearly there. When he says 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 be forgiven him. I think what's going on there is the Lord is saying that many times people are going to be experiencing affliction and when you go and you minister to them, you're going to find out that the affliction is related to sins, or it's exposing sins that they need to confess, and when they confess them and when you do the prayer of faith the way you're supposed to do it here, going and anointing and counseling with them, then there will be a new level of cleansing in their life. They'll be spiritually restored to the fullness of fellowship. You know, when we sin, it doesn't change the way God sees us. You're in Christ, it never changes, you stand in grace, but when we sin, unconfessed sin in our life, it distances us from the Lord on our side. It's kind of like putting up an umbrella over yourself so that you keep the sunlight of

God's love from feeling the warmth of it completely. It's still there, God still loves you now and he may bring some circumstances in but even those are his love. It doesn't change how he feels about you if you're in Christ but your experience of that, your awareness of that, and truly the power in your life. You're cutting yourself off in unconfessed sin.

So part of the counseling is when you go to meet with someone, he says to the elders, "When you go, you need to understand that sin may be a real issue in this situation." So you counsel with them. This is why it's not just quickly a three-minute thing, we're here, we anoint, we pray, we leave. Now sometimes it'll be quicker than others and before surgery or something, you don't, you know, spend an hour and a half, "Sorry, doc, you've got to wait. We've got to work this out." They might let you do that, they would just schedule you for tomorrow, right, or next week, or next month depending on it. Anyway, no, what we do is when someone calls for the elders, there needs to be discernment about talking about, "Listen, how are you doing?" This would look a little different, you know, "How are you doing with what's going on? How are you doing with the diagnosis?" And encourage people to share freely and share freely and openly. We're not supposed to pretend that we've got it all together. This is where you say to those the Lord has put in your life, "I'm really struggling. I don't know why God is doing this to me right now." And when you do that, you're sounding a lot like the Psalms sound, "Why, Lord? How long, O Lord?" This is where you voice that and in talking through that, I mean, you do it with the Lord but this is another way of doing that. The elders come to help you in meeting with God over your situation.

Now they may discern that there's really, you know, hey, you've got bitterness in your life and it's certainly a possibility, according to the Scripture, that you may be being afflicted physically because you are sinning spiritually in some profound ways. This is what 1 Corinthians 11 is talking about. We're going to have the Lord's Supper today and I'll often mention that we should examine ourselves to see if we take the bread and drink the cup in a worthy manner. When Paul talks about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11, he says, he's talking about how there are divisions in the body, there are, you know, rivalries and pride and vanity, and there's, you know, probably there's bitterness, there's hostility, and he says because of that, then you come to the Lord's Table in this state and you're dis-united, you're against one another, for this reason many of you, Paul says, are weak and sick and some even sleep. That's a euphemism for have died. Paul is telling the Corinthian church some of the people in the Corinthian church have died because they have done such harm to the physical body of Christ and they would not repent and so the Lord took them home. This is the seriousness of the unity of the body. Well, part of the ministry of the elders would be to try to discern that. Someone calls for the elders of the church and they want to help them see, "Are you holding grudges? Is there some guilt in your life that you've not made right with someone else? Let's get these things right."

So that's part of it, the counseling, but also a part of this counsel is to try to discern what the Lord is doing in this illness, what's the purpose of this illness. Was it some kind of remedial discipline for sin, the Lord's getting your attention to deal with your heart? Sometimes it'll be that, oftentimes it won't, we won't be able to determine exactly what it

is but we know that God does have a purpose for everything. He does nothing by accident and so the question is, is the Lord giving you this illness so that he can miraculously heal you, is that what we're supposed to pray for? Are we supposed to pray for grace to bear up under it? Are we supposed to pray for grace to die well? These are the things that the prayer of faith is intended to help us discern and it comes through talking about things in this context of prayer. That's why it's the elders, they're shepherds, they're shepherding the needy believer in how to follow Jesus at this moment. "With the path that God has set before you, this is what we discern. As we pray together, it appears that this is the way we're moving. We want to help you follow Christ," and we all need that, especially at moments of weakness.

So counsel, go, anoint, counsel, fourthly, pray. The overarching point of the whole passage is pray. Prayer makes a difference and clearly that's what he's saying here. The prayer of faith makes a difference so pray. I mean, as you are discerning what even through the process of praying it becomes clearer what is God's purpose, and often you start off believing maybe the Lord is going to heal this person, he's going to extend their life, but the prayer of faith will give clarity to that.

So in fact, what is faith? What is it to pray in faith? Many today misunderstand what faith is. They think faith is trusting in whatever you want but trusting in it so fully that you get it. It's almost like the power of positive thinking. That is completely unbiblical. That is not faith biblically. Faith is trusting the promise of God. Faith is a response to the word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Faith is not something you gin up from within and determine what you want and bend God's will to do what you want. No, faith is actually discerning what God has said, what God's will is, and trusting in that. So that's the counsel in prayer of faith here coming together where you're trying to discern what is the Lord's will here, thinking about his word and what he tells us, thinking about the circumstances, praying about it. What is God calling this believer to?

I mean, the prayer of faith for somebody like Joni Eareckson, at some point she may not have had the elders of the church do this but she talks about how other Christians helped her discern the will of God. She determined that it was not the Lord's will to heal her physically of quadriplegia. It was the Lord's will to empower her in her weakness to glorify Christ and at some point, and you hear her testimony she talks about how that reality became clear and she wanted to be healed, she wanted to be healed, she wanted to be healed but the Lord showed her, no, just like he told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you for My strength is made perfect in weakness. This time I'm not going to heal you physically."

So the prayer of faith, that's the elders praying with you and especially in times of weakness and especially in times of physical weakness when you don't know what to pray as you ought to pray. We have the confidence that the Holy Spirit prays with us but we also have the confidence that God's people come around us and pray, and as we discern that, what we're praying for, we're praying for the glory of God and that's going to be manifest with the enablement and the empowerment of this believer to do what God is calling them to do. When God puts me in that position, he puts you in that position, the

question is what is he calling us to do and whatever he calls us to do, he will empower us to do if we pray, but the point is you've got to pray. You've got to do this to receive that clarity.

So the second point we'll hit quickly this morning, the power of the prayer of faith. The practice was to go, anoint, counsel, pray. The power is seen in those three verbs I mentioned at the beginning of the message: will restore the one who is sick, will raise him up, sins if he has committed them will be forgiven, restored. We mentioned last time the word "sozo" means "to rescue; to save; to deliver." It's a radical change of circumstances. Spiritually you've been in danger, you've been in peril because of the way that your soul has been afflicted and you're worn out, you're weak in heart, and the prayer of faith will bring power to you and will deliver you from that weakness. We talked about the word "raise up" means "to be awakened; to get up out of sleep." You've been in a stupor but the prayer of faith is going to help you to wake you up to follow God. Your sins are forgiven. You draw near to God. Your fellowship is restored. You're empowered. You're rescued. You're awakened. Restored in fellowship. You're anointed and set apart for the work now. The formerly disheartened believer comes to see God's purpose and God's plan in his life and God gives him power to embrace that purpose and that plan.

These circumstances are not just random happenings. This suffering is not just meaningless. No, "I now see that God has a purpose and a plan for this." It's not just theoretical belief in the sovereignty of God, as important as that is. That's not where we live. We need practical belief in the sovereignty of God, that this, this circumstance is intended by God for his glory and for my good and now I see it. This is the path that God has laid out for me. The clarity that comes brings encouragement. What happens here is a decisive change happens in the person and this decisive change only happens through this prayer, this kind of heart of praying for God's will to be done, a prayer of faith, trusting in the Lord. It brings about decisive clarity, "Now I see the circumstance. I understand it in a way I didn't before." It brings about, this clarity brings about decisive confidence. "Now I know that God, he's in charge. He's showing me what he's going to do, he's going to empower me." It brings about decisive conviction. "Now I know that I can bear up under this and what I'm called to do and so I'm going to fight to finish the course well."

Ephesians 2:10 says, "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." What happens is the prayer of faith brings about clarity about here are the good works that God is calling you to. This is the good work. And praise his name, faithful is he who called you, he also will do it. He doesn't call us to anything without giving us the grace and that's what that anointing is about. It's reminding us that the Spirit is going to equip us and empower us. I mean, none of us can imagine going through things. Isn't it amazing how, I hear this testimony through the years so many times where someone, I see someone bearing up under suffering in ways that just makes me marvel at God's goodness and God's power and you sense in them and as they talk about it, you know, they never would have imagined that they could have done it. And that's the way it should be, we shouldn't be so proud that we would think we would do well. We would hope that we do well if we trust

in Christ and Christ will always do well and that's what he's saying here. If you will humble yourself and pray, you will be able to bear up.

That doesn't mean there's not going to be need for ongoing encouragement, this doesn't mean that you get, it's a one and done situation. "I had the prayer of faith. I never need any other encouragement in my life. I am full steam ahead." No, that's inconsistent with the rest of the Bible. We're to encourage one another day after day. We're to bear one another's burdens and thus fulfill the law of Christ. We keep walking alongside but this talks about a decisive clarity and sense of conviction that comes through the prayer of faith. This is what we're called to do and when this happens, God's glory will be made known.

So we need to pray more emphatically, more in more faith this way, that God is able to do what he's calling us to do. He is good and we can trust him.

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank You for Your word, we thank You for the clarity that it brings to our lives. We just acknowledge, Lord, how weak we are, how needy we are. We thank You that even what we've looked at today shows us that You understand that completely. We can do nothing apart from You. Jesus said, "Apart from Me, you can do nothing," and so we must have Your empowerment to do whatever You call us to do. In our flesh dwells no good thing. Father, we thank You that whatever You're going to call each one of us, some of us right now are going through very difficult trials and some need to call for this prayer in their life, help them have the faith to do it. Help us, Lord, to see Your glory made known in their lives. Lord, all of us are going to find ourselves in situations where we never expected that we would be and thank You, Lord, that we can rest assured in those moments that You're not surprised, that You've not been caught off-guard but that You are working out Your perfect plan. Give us more faith. Help us walk as Jesus walked and may we walk in the power of Your Spirit for the glory of Your name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.