

Healing Solutions for Real Life Conditions

Written by Bob Stone

When we are in trouble; when we are sick (physically, emotionally, or spiritually); or even when we are happy, God has provided game plans for us to follow in community.

James 5:13-20

When I was growing up, I had a dog named FuFu. He was named after my mom's best friend whose nickname was Lulu. My brother and I couldn't pronounce the letter "L" at such a young age, so Lulu became FuFu.

I was 12 years old when I received the news from the veterinarian that my dog was dying of distemper. He said he only had a few days to live, so I should take him home. I still remember how crushed I was; because for a shy young man, my dog was my constant companion.

When I arrived home, I decided it was time for prayer. So in the front room under a blue chair, I began to pray for my dog. I can still remember the essence of the prayer. It was "God, my mom told me animals were put here on this planet for our pleasure. If you take FuFu right now, I'm not going to be very happy. God, I ask that you would heal FuFu of this sickness and if you do, I will really be glad!"

I stayed under the chair for a long time. I praised God for giving me FuFu, and if He took him I would accept it, but it wasn't what I wanted, etc. Well FuFu got well almost immediately and I never took him to a vet again!

FuFu was my dog all the way through high school and the first three years of college. But then came the time of separation. I got married to Nancy. After the honeymoon we came back to Wenatchee for a few weeks before we went off to school. When it came time to go to bed, FuFu jumped up on the bed as he always had. It was then that Nancy announced it was either FuFu or me. I thought about it for awhile (just kidding). Nancy won!

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It is a crazy thing, but that one experience gave me a lot of faith in many circumstances throughout my teenage years.

Since that day, I have had the opportunity to pray for many people. But even with this experience, I have a number of questions about healing solutions for real life conditions. For example, what does it mean to be a healing community? As a church, we believe the climate where healing takes place has four characteristics: love, acceptance, forgiveness and belonging. But how does this climate play itself out in real life conditions? James very beautifully gives us four practical illustrations of healing in action in James 5:13-20. (We will look at three of them.) What would be the outcome if a church decided to take this passage seriously? How would it change lives? How would it impact our gathering times as a church?

13 Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. 14 Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. 16 Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. 17 Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. 18 Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. 19 My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, 20 remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

The Conditions of a Life

James 5:13-18 lists common conditions God intends us to share together with Him and each other.

In trouble

v. 13a—"Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray."

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He's talking about hardship of every sort, physical or mental. It literally means to be in distress with no immediate relief. It could be persecution, old fears, relationships, finances, disputes, accidents, etc.—2 Tim. 2:9. Does that surprise you? It shouldn't.

"The definition of a Christian: continually joyful and constantly in trouble." (Ray Stedman)

James assumes we will be in trouble. Why will prayer help us when we are in trouble?

Sometimes we feel deserted/lonely, as Paul did.

2 Tim. 4:9-10—*"Do your best to come to me quickly, 10] for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. 11] Only Luke is with me."*

When we feel lonely, prayer will put us in touch with God's presence and can also make the way for human compassion!—Psalm 23:4; 34:15; 68:6. Other times we are attacked by our enemy, and prayer is a part of our armor—Eph. 6:18-20. At times we need grace, strength, and wisdom to make it through our trials and troubles—James 1:5; 4:6; Heb. 4:14-16; 1 Pet. 3:12. Prayer supplies the grace we need in our trouble, because the Lord is attentive to our prayers.

Why prayer? Prayer is what supplies the interior resources we need to make it. All prayer boils down to a startling fact: God wants to talk with us, listen to us, be with us, sustain us, and give us whatever we need. So when we are in trouble, we should pray! It is our responsibility to pray when in trouble. In fact, this passage shows us that all conditions in our life should ultimately lead to God and His church.

Feeling happy

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v. 13b—*"Is any one happy? Let him sing songs of praise (psalms)."*

Happiness means to be of a cheerful mind—to be of good cheer. What does happiness bring? What does it produce? Happiness brings relief and peace from trouble, but along with it comes a lot of vulnerability and forgetfulness. Do you know what I mean by that? When we're happy, we tend not to be cautious and we forget what the trouble was like.

So what will keep happiness steady and growing, as well as give our happiness godly content? *"Let him sing songs of praise (psalms)..."* This is one of the few places in Scripture that tells us what to do when we are happy—see also Psalm 68:3.

To "sing praises" originally meant singing to the music of a harp; then it came to mean singing with or without instruments. Often used of public singing; here the term is probably being used of personal or private singing—see Acts 16:25 and Paul and Silas.

Many people miss this admonition because their whole orientation to Christianity is forged in the time of trouble and they have not the slightest idea what Scripture wants us to do when things are going well. But pay attention, this instruction is critical to our maintenance of true happiness. It also prepares us for trouble if it does come.

Another reason to sing songs of praise when we are happy is that they are better than the secular counterpart. Many Christians who have a constant diet of secular music do not know it is robbing/dissipating their happiness, because it adds little or no content or encouragement to their joy. It is very difficult to maintain Christian joy in our spirit when there is a steady (exclusive) diet of secular lyrics.

Why sing praise? Why do we need personal and corporate praise to God? Praise focuses our attention on the Lord. It reinforces who is the Source of our happiness, and it feeds our spirit.

What will help us achieve this praise?

- a song list kept in our Bibles
- singing psalms extemporaneously/secretly
- letting the singing flow naturally—in the shower, in the car, as we walk, listening to Christian music
- words of favorite hymns written down
- praying God's attributes

James moves from praise to another common problem.

Being sick—v. 14; Matt. 10:8; John 4:46; Rom. 14:1; John 12:40.

"Sick" here denotes illness that is physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual. It means to be without strength—Matt. 10:8; John 4:46; Rom. 14:1; John 12:40. What should we do when this is our condition?—v. 14b.

The people to call:
Elders

Notice two observations: First, "elders" is plural—Acts 11:30; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:1; 2 John 1. Spiritual leaders function best in teams, e.g., Jesus, the apostle Paul, etc. We need more than one to relate to. The gift mix is healthy. Second, the elders and sick are found in a community of believers—a Church (v. 14; 2:2). They are not alone.

Let me ask a few questions about this:

Who are your spiritual leaders and elders?

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If you do not have elders, are you cutting yourself off from some of God's provision? (Yes! The sick are not to be alone, but in God's design for the church, are to have spiritual care. The elders are one of His instruments.)

But does that mean the elders are the only ones to call? No! If the elders are doing their job, they are training others to watch/care over the flock.

Deacons/leaders—Acts 6:6, 8

In Acts 6, when there were too many needs for the Lord's disciples to minister to, they asked the people to select the first deacons with certain qualifications (full of the Spirit and wisdom). Then they brought these early deacons to the apostles where the apostles placed their hands on them.

What did this mean? It implied **identification**, **relationship**, and **recognition**. Likewise in this church community, all the small group leaders and deacons are in relationship with at least one of the elders.

Is this all who can or should pray? No. Every believer should pray for the needs before him—James 5:16; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Eph. 6:18-20.

How should this prayer be carried out? The process is very specific.
If you or a family/friend are sick, call—take the initiative (you or your family).

- Over the phone
- Before, after, during services
- Make an appointment
- Write a note with your request
- Prayer chain
- Small group, etc.

There is no way people will know you are sick unless you tell them. When we become sick, our first step is to take the initiative to make others aware of our specific need. We

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continually have folks going in the hospital and not telling anyone. Call the elders; call the office. We'll establish a visiting schedule."

"Pray over him..." (means hands over him).

The hands represent the heart and the identification in prayer with the one who has a need.

"Anoint him with oil..."

Why should we use oil? Here are some possible reasons for oil:

1. First, in some instances the oil was applied for medicinal purposes—Ps. 23:5 (shepherd); Lk. 10:34 (the good Samaritan). That is probably not how it is being used in this instance.

2. The second reason oil is used today is because the disciples used oil when praying for the sick—Mark 6:13. This also shows the broadening of prayer ministry beyond the disciples. The oil is now a part of regular church life.

3. Third, Scripture teaches oil is symbolic of the Holy Spirit's presence. First Samuel 16:13 tells of anointing the king with oil, thus recognizing him as God's choice. On that day, the Spirit of God came upon the future king with power.

4. Fourth, oil can also be used very specifically to symbolize the consecration of a person to God's will and service, e.g., the dedication of babies. This is seen in the Old Testament in Exodus 29:7 and 30:30.

So why oil? When the elders pray and anoint a sick person, it declares this person is being set apart for God's special attention and care. It also symbolizes the presence of the Holy Spirit and demonstrates the sick person's consecration to the Lord's work and will, whatever that might be. Some object to using oil, but think of the other methods

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used in Scripture to bring about healing: mud, spit, a dip in the polluted Jordan river. Aren't you glad we follow this passage?

". . .in the name of the Lord."

This means we are to pray in Jesus' stead, by His power and authority—Lk. 10:17; Acts 3:6,12,16; 16:18. We are not the healers; we are the stand-ins praying as Jesus' representatives. What should we expect and have faith for? Notice:

The promises to claim—vv. 15,16

The sick get well/healed—v. 15a. See 1 Pet. 2:24.

The Lord (not us) raises them up—v. 15b.

Their sins are forgiven—v. 15c.

Note, the passage reads *if* they have sinned, not since they have sinned. So please don't misunderstand; obviously a person's sickness is not always because of his/her sin. Jesus says this in John 9:1 —

"As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2] His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' 3] 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, 'but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.'"

But having made the point, it is also true there are occasions when unrepentant sin can cause serious health conditions.

- 1 Cor. 11:29-32—the Corinthians got weak, sick, and some died because of their sin.
- Acts 5:1-11—Ananias and Sapphira died.
- Psalm 32:1-5—When David didn't confess his sin, his bones wasted away and his strength was sapped.
- John 5:14—After Jesus healed a man, He told the man to stop sinning or something worse would happen to him..

The prayers of the righteous will work.

v. 16b—"... and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective."

Isn't that great news? Prayers offered by righteous people are powerful and effective (literally, "are able to do much"). How will all this happen according to James? Are there any prerequisites? From these verses, we see a number of them:

The prerequisites to healing—vv. 14a-16

- Call someone (i.e., elders, spiritual leaders, spiritual friends who will earnestly pray), take the initiative—vv. 14a,16b.
- Confess to each other—v. 16a; Prov. 11:13.
- Pray for each other—v. 16b.
- Be righteous and earnestly pray—vv. 16-17a.
- Have faith—v. 15a. **Believe!**
- Be in a church where there is spiritual leadership/eldership and trained workers—v. 14; Eph. 4:16.

Those are the promises and the prerequisites. What are the implications? Does this passage guarantee healing?

The potential to prepare for

What if someone is not immediately healed, or never healed? Doesn't this passage guarantee healing? No.

Here are a few things to think about if there is no immediate healing:

- No faith/little faith—v. 15a; Mark 6:1-6. In America, it is possible we are like Jesus' hometown. He could not do many miracles because of their lack of faith. Our faith affects our healing.
- Healing is delayed/progressive—Mark 8:22-26; 9:14-29; John 9:3.
- No confession of sin or prayer—James 5:16. Result: Psalm 32:1-5.
- Our illness gets our attention. For instance:

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Affliction teaches us the Word—Psalm 119:71.

Affliction teaches us not to wander—119:67.

Sickness/weakness can be used to lead and strengthen us—2 Cor. 12:7-10;
Gal. 4:12-13.

- Don't shoot the wounded (Gal. 4:12-15); help the weak—1 Thess. 5:14. It means hug and hold them.
- The body wears out—2 Cor. 4:16.

(Sidebar:) There are two kinds of sin—original and personal. Original sin refers to the sin nature we inherited from Adam—Rom. 5:12. Personal sin is the daily disobedience spawned by our old nature—Rom. 7:14-23. Original sin, then, introduced sickness and death to the human race—Rom. 5:12. Had Adam and Eve never sinned, they would never have died, but because they disobeyed God, sickness and death spread to every living thing. So in the broadest sense, all sickness and death is the result of original sin. Some sickness happens, therefore, because we are humans in a sick world.

- Suffering can achieve good—2 Cor. 4:16-18.
- Other means used—1 Tim. 5:23, i.e., doctors, medicines, cures. God uses the healing process in the body as well as doctors and medicines, to bring healing.
- Don't know why—2 Tim. 4:20; Phil. 2:25-27. Why were these men sick? Why did he leave one sick?

These are reasons, not excuses. I believe we should continue to pray and believe God for healing, but if healing doesn't happen as we think it should, then we have to continue to trust in God's sovereignty. We must also rely on the best medical advice available.

James now concludes this section of healing prayer by putting this whole teaching in a context his audience would understand.

He gives them an example:

The pattern to follow—vv. 16b-18.

Did you see who Elijah was like? Elijah was *like us*—v. 17a, i.e., normal, emotional—1 Kings 19:4,10,14. (Study how normal he was.) But that didn't stop God from using him. Elijah was also righteous—v. 16b ("one right with God"—Rom. 3:24; or "one who acts righteously"—1 John 3:7).

How did Elijah express his righteousness? Elijah prayed earnestly, intensely. Literally, "with prayer he prayed." As a result, Elijah's prayers were answered—vv. 17b-18.

Conclusion

The sick need leaders and all believers to be like Elijah. What can we do to be like him? Look again at the prerequisites. We must do what God has called us to do.

What if there are answers other than what we would like? Whatever the initial response, we must follow the pattern of Elijah and keep trusting God for great things. I believe we should keep praying until God heals by any means, or makes it clear He has another road for this person to follow. Never be embarrassed about praying and believing for God's healing.

Small Group Questions and Reflections

1. What is the most obvious application of this passage to you? Your family?
2. When do you have the greatest difficulty praying? What helps and hurts your prayer when you need it most? What is your plan when you are in trouble (v. 13)?
3. Where, when, and how do you praise God best? What aids your praise?
4. How will a previously established lifestyle of praise impact a person when they get in trouble or are sick?
5. Why do you believe people are not healed today as they were in the New Testament?
6. Reflections: Read through the verses under: [what if someone is not immediately](#)

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[healed, or never healed](#)

with any of these verses? Would you add any reasons? What is your desire and prayer regarding healing? What will it take? ? Do you disagree

7. Have you known a time when your sin affected you physically? Does Psalm 32:1-5 describe any of your feelings or experiences? If you can, explain.

8. When is confession appropriate? Inappropriate? To whom should you confess? Describe the character and follow-up of a person/group who hears a confession from another.

9. Why is Elijah our model for prayer? How is Elijah like us/you?