

CLINGING TO HOPE

STUDY THREE

When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16

God reserves the right to heal or not heal as He sees fit. Being the sovereign God of our lives, He has all the voting rights on our health.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WHAT do we do when we're sick? Some say that sick people should trust in God's power alone to heal them rather than medicine.

The Scriptures, however, never draw a line between praying for healing and seeking help from a physician. In fact, James' prescription for sick people includes both prayer and medical care. Let's take a closer look at his instructions for the suffering and the sick in James 5:13–16.

**PREPARE YOUR HEART**

Doctors prescribe medications and perform surgeries, but, ultimately, all healing comes from the One who formed our bodies. Take a few moments in prayer to offer yourself to God and receive grace to understand what His Word says about healing.

Father, I humble myself before You as the maker and healer of my body and soul. Grant me wisdom as I learn Your ways and follow Your prescription for my life. In Jesus' name, amen.



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When God Heals Body and Soul

James 5:13–16



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

James wrote his epistle to persecuted Christians whose suffering severely tested their faith. In the opening chapter, He counseled his readers to endure their trials with joy, seeing them as avenues to maturity and faith. In his final chapter, James urged “patience in suffering” and offered Job as a model (James 5:10–11). He concluded with practical steps to follow when we’re suffering—prayer being his central theme.



Observation: The Suffering, the Cheerful, and the Sick

Observation is the first phase of *Searching the Scriptures*. As you read the verses, look for patterns, questions and answers, steps to follow, commands, and promises.

What instructions do you observe in *James 5:13*?

What do suffering hardships and enjoying happiness have in common?



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What steps do you observe in *James 5:14*?

What teaching about the body and soul, sickness and sin, and prayer and confession do you observe in *5:15–16*?

Can God heal? Yes, of course. With Him, nothing is impossible. He can heal, and He often does. A physician can diagnose and prescribe medicine, but the healing is in God's hands.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of Key Words

An accurate interpretation of Scripture often hinges on definitions of key words, such as “suffering” and “sick” in *James 5:13–14*. Commentaries, such as *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: James, 1 & 2 Peter*, Bible dictionaries, and lexicons help us discover the meaning of the Greek words.



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An excellent online resource is netbible.org. Go to James 5 on this website and click the “Greek” tab. The NET Bible translation of James 5 will appear on the left pane and the Greek New Testament on the right. Hover your cursor over the words *suffering* and *ill* (James 5:13–14 NET). The corresponding Greek word will be highlighted in yellow, and a box containing the definition of the Greek word will also appear. Using this resource or one of your other study aids, write down the definitions of the Greek words in the chart below.

English Word	Greek Root Word	Definition
<i>suffering</i> (5:13)	<i>kakopatheo</i>	
<i>ill</i> (5:14)	<i>astheneo</i>	

These terms describe two conditions that call for specific actions involving prayer. James didn’t say explicitly, but what did James imply the suffering person should pray for?

Pray for encouragement, for recovery from doubt and anxiety, for help to overcome depression. There’s therapy in releasing anxiety through prayer. If you are troubled, the answer is to pray. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What should those who are too sick to leave their bed do? Ill people should summon the elders to come and to pray, “anointing [them] with oil in the name of the Lord” (5:14).



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In his commentary, Pastor Chuck Swindoll sheds light on the meaning of “anointing.”

We find two distinct uses of anointing with oil in the Bible. One involves a religious or ceremonial act as a symbol for consecration—as in the anointing of David as king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:13). A more mundane type of anointing was for medicinal or hygienic purposes. . . .

Most likely James has the second use of oil in mind. The idea behind the use of both prayer and anointing was that the church should seek to come to the aid of both the physical and spiritual needs of a sick person. The medicinal use of oil provided physical comfort and promoted the healing process. Please observe that for James there was *no* conflict between prayer and medicine.¹

In James’ day, anointing with medicinal oil was one means of medical care. The Good Samaritan, for example, rubbed oil in the wounds of the victim on the side of the road (Luke 10:34). So, the implication for our day is that not only should the elders come to pray, but also the sick person should accept medical treatment. Prayer and medical care go hand in hand.

The elders are to pray and anoint the person “*in the name of the Lord*” (James 5:14, emphasis added). What does it mean to pray “in the name of the Lord”? Why is it important to always pray in the Lord’s name?



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In matters of healing, God alone has the say regarding our restoration—“the Lord will make you well” (James 5:15) and “raise [you] up” (5:15 NASB). Sometimes, James was saying, the Lord answers our prayers for healing and raises up the sick person through a divine act. In Greek, the word for *heal* in 5:15 is *sozo*, which means “save” or “rescue” or “preserve.” What else did James say that God alone has authority to grant in 5:15?

James concluded his instructions in 5:16. Put this verse in your own words and, from the context, summarize the roles of prayer and confession in healing body and soul.

No elder has a magical gift to heal. The elder comes to pray over the sick person in the name of the Lord. That’s not a cliché. It means appealing to God’s will. “We trust You, Lord, and we want Your will to be done.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Praying in Jesus’ Name for God’s Will

Praying in Jesus’ name means to pray to the Father in Jesus’ authority as His representative (John 15:16; 16:23–24). “In Jesus’ name” isn’t a formula we attach to prayer to get whatever we wish but an invitation to ask the Father for what *Jesus* would ask, always in accordance with the Father’s will.



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Read *1 John 5:14–15* in the Amplified Bible. What instructions did John give about prayer that further explain Jesus' teaching?

A prayer for healing offered in the name of Jesus always appeals to the will of God. He's the sovereign One who determines whether or not a sick person will be healed.

Application: Four Practical Principles

Our part is to follow the biblical steps when we fall ill. Let's review them in principle form.

- *Confession of sin is healthy—employ it.* Don't let sins build up in your life to the point that they make you physically ill.
- *Praying for one another is essential—practice it.* If you become ill, call upon the elders of your church to come and pray for you. Pray for healing and ask others to pray.
- *Use of medical assistance is imperative—utilize it.* Asking for prayer but ignoring proper medical treatment is not James' point.
- *When healing comes from God—claim it.* Whether or not the illness is the result of personal sin, when God heals, remember to thank Him and give Him the glory!



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Write down how you can apply these principles. Do you need to ask for prayer? To pray for another person? To seek medical advice? To confess sin? Take a moment right now to pray!

From the beginning of James 5:13–16 to the end, prayer is the focus. Prayer connects a believer's heart with the sovereign will of God—trusting the One who may or may not choose to heal. If we have joy and health, we should sing praises to God. If we suffer with mental, emotional, or physical pain, then we must pray for healing, confess our sins, and receive God's forgiveness. Most importantly, we must entrust ourselves to God's perfect plan.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for Your marvelous power to heal us physically and restore us spiritually. I seek Your will for my situation. Bind up my broken heart. Strengthen my failing body. Renew my suffering spirit according to Your wise and merciful plan. In the name of Jesus and according to Your will, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary: Insights on James, 1 & 2 Peter* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2014), 124.

