

DISCERNING THE TRUTH

A CASE STUDY: THE “PRAYER OF FAITH” FOR THE SICK - JAMES 5:13-20

Most common interpretation: *Physical healing*

- 1A. Application #1: *The oil is understood to be for medicinal purposes*
 - 1B. The sick person seeks medical attention and...
 - 2B. Asks the pastor, elders (and the church) to pray
- 2A. Application #2: *The oil is understood to be for ceremonial purposes*
 - 1B. The sick person is anointed with ceremonial oil and...
 - 2B. The pastor / elders lay hands on the sick person, while all pray the “prayer of faith”

Evaluating the “physical sickness” interpretation

- 1A. Practical questions / issues / problems related to the “physical sickness” view
 - 1B. If this is a promise of *physical* healing, why are many / most **not** physically healed?
 - 1C. When someone isn’t healed is it always due to a lack of faith?
 - 2C. If so, whose faith is lacking - the one praying, the one needing prayer or both?
 - 3C. **Timothy**: *Paul told him to take wine as medicine for ongoing stomach problems* (1Tim 5:23)
 - 4C. **Trophimus**: *Paul left him sick in Miletus* (2 Tim 4:20)
 - 5C. **Epaphroditus**: *He nearly died from some illness* (Phi 2:25-27)
 - 6C. **Paul**: *His physical problem was never healed* (2 Cor 12:7-10)
 - 2B. In what sense is the sick person “saved”?
 - 3B. What is the connection between sin and sickness?
 - 4B. Is “physical sickness” the only way to understand this passage?

5B. Why is the illustration of Elijah specifically used?

2A. “**suffering**” in James 5:13

1B. A form of “κακοπαθέω” (kakopatheo)

2B. Found 4 times in the New Testament

*“Thou therefore **endure** hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Tim 2:3)*

*“Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel: Wherein I **suffer** trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.” (2 Timothy 2:8–9)*

*“But watch thou in all things, **endure** afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.” (2 Timothy 4:5–6)*

*“Is any among you **afflicted**? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.” (James 5:13)*

3A. “**sick**” in James 5:14

1B. A form of “ἄσθενέω” (α + σθενέω [a + stheneo] = “no **strength**”) (A different word than in verse 15)

2B. ἄσθενέω can mean physical sickness / disease:

*“Heal the **sick**, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.” (Matthew 10:8)*

*“Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any **sick** with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them.” (Luke 4:40)*

3B. **However**, ἄσθενέω often means spiritual, psychological, or emotional **weakness**

1C. The “flesh” is **weak** - in the context of temptation:

*“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is **weak**.” (Matthew 26:41)*

2C. The “conscience” is **weak** - in the context of meat offered to idols (4x):

“Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience

*being **weak** is defiled.” (1 Corinthians 8:7-12)*

- 3C. Means “**weakness**” (not “sickness”) **every** time in Romans:
(Rom 4:19; 5:6; 6:19; 8:26; 14:1-2; 15:1)

*“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara’s womb:”
(Rom 4:19)*

- 4C. Perhaps the best interpretation would be: *“Is anyone among you struggling spiritually?”*

- 4A. “**sick**” in James 5:15

1B. A form of “κάμνω” (kamno)

2B. Used only two other times

*“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be **wearied** and faint in your minds.” (Heb 12:3)*

*“And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not **fainted**..” (Rev 2:3)*

- 5A. “**healed**” in James 5:16

1B. A form of “ἰάομαι” (iaomai) (26x in New Testament)

2B. Majority of uses = “**physical healing**”

*“And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and **healed** them all.” (Luke 6:18-19)*

3B. However, it can also refer to **spiritual restoration ...**

1C. **Jesus quoting Isaiah (6:10):** *“For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should **heal** them..” (Matt 13:15)*

2C. **John quoting same passage** in John 12:40

- 3C. **Peter quoting Isaiah** (Isa 53:5): *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were **healed**.”* (1 Pet 2:24)
- 4C. In the context of helping someone through the Lord’s chastisement: *“And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be **healed**.”* (Heb 12:13)
- 5C. “Confess your faults to one another” (James 5:16) is about **spiritual restoration**

6A. **“Anoint with oil”** in James 5:14

1B. Form of “ἀλείφω” (aleipho) → 9x in NT

1C. 8x clearly related to the care of the body such as:

Mary anointing Jesus’ feet

*“(It was that Mary which **anointed** the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.)”* (John 11:2)

Care for Jesus’ body at His burial

*“And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome, had bought sweet spices, that they might come and **anoint** him..”* (Mark 16:1, cf. John 12:3-7)

Someone caring for themselves (properly grooming) while fasting

*“But thou, when thou fastest, **anoint** thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”* (Matt 6:17–18)

2C. Only 1x possibly ceremonial (but very likely not)

*“And they cast out many devils, and **anointed** with oil many that were sick, and healed them.”* (Mark 6:13)

2B. The normal word for ceremonial anointing: “χρίω” (chrio)

Luke quoting Isaiah (61:1): *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath **anointed** me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the*

brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,” (Luke 4:18)

- 3B. Conclusion: *In James 5, the oil is for grooming and refreshing someone who has not taken care of themselves because they are going through a difficult time - perhaps depression.*

Interpreting James 5:13-20

- 1A. Does James mean physical healing?
- 1B. Healing in the general context of the New Testament letters
- 1C. Physical healing mentioned **only** in 1 Corinthians 12 and only in connection with the sign gift
- “Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of **healing**? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?” (1 Cor 12:29–30)*
- 2C. Physical healing is **never** connected to the ministry of elders (or pastors)
- 2B. Healing in the overall context of James
- 1C. Physical healing is **not** in harmony with the rest of James
- 2C. A **major focus** of James is “spiritual struggles in the Christian life”
- 2A. **Preceding context:** refers to someone’s spiritual and emotional condition, **not their physical condition**
- 1B. (5:13) “Is anyone suffering?” (i.e, “enduring hardship”) → then “Let him pray”
- 2B. (5:13) “Is anyone cheerful” → “Let him sing.”
- 3A. **Following context:** refers to someone’s **spiritual** and **emotional** condition, **not their physical condition**
- 1B. (5:16a) “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.” (*Appears to be a restatement of verse 14*)

- 2B. (5:16) The prayers of a righteous man (like Elijah) are effective
- 3B. (5:19-20) "...Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.."