

The Elders' Prayer for the Weak

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Date: 12 July 2009

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[0:00] James 5, beginning in verse 13. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is any one happy? Let him sing songs of praise.

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. 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. 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.

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. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

If you have your Bibles, please open them to James 5. Verses 14 and 15 are our texts for today.

[1:05] Camel knees. There's a long-standing tradition that James was nicknamed camel knees because of the calluses that had formed on his knees from having given himself to so much prayer.

So we're not surprised that as James comes to the end of his letter, he takes up the subject of prayer in a concentrated way. He began the letter very early on, introduced the theme of prayer. When we face trials, we come to see our need for wisdom. And so he says, you need to ask God for it. Pray and pray believingly. In chapter 4, he told us the reason you don't have is because you do not ask God.

And now as he comes to the end of his letter, in verses 14 through 18, prayer is the dominant theme. In every one of those verses, 13 through 18, prayer is mentioned.

And in one verse, even twice. So clearly, his burden and his topic as he comes to the end is prayer. Its importance, its absolute necessity, its power, its possibilities, its fruits, its effectiveness.

[2:31] And he talks about the individual believer at prayer, verse 13. He talks about the elders of the church at prayer, verses 14 and 15. And then he will speak of the fellowship of believers, one another at prayer, verse 16.

At the very least, James is putting us on notice that the pursuit of holiness, which is his general theme of this letter, will only be successful if it's pursued on our knees.

There's no such thing as the pursuit of holiness apart from serious prayer. A Christian pursuing, persevering, and growing in holiness will be a Christian at prayer.

And that's because the Christian life depends on divine resources. And those divine resources are supplied in answer to prayer.

So are you in trouble? Pray. Pray. Pray. Whether you feel like it or not, cry to God. And so camel knees would tell us, if you drop in on a Christian, you ought to find him often at prayer.

[3:48] Now, in verse 13, James told us how to respond to two different categories of life situation.

Life as it comes to you. He says, if you are in trouble, pray. If you are happy, sing praises. And in both, there is the Godward dimension of the Christian life.

That whatever the circumstance, we look up and we pray or we praise. Now, James gives us an example of a specific kind of trouble and instructs us further about it.

Verse 14 begins, Is any one of you sick? No question for anyone who's ever been sick that to be sick is to be in trouble.

Now, this is a passage full of difficulties. Indeed, many have said it's not only the most difficult section in James' letter, but in the whole New Testament.

[4:52] And it seems to me that the whole passage turns on what kind of sickness James is talking about here. Most translations of the Bible take it as physical sickness, indeed, as our NIV does.

In fact, all but one of the translations I checked take it as physical illness. Most commentaries take it as referring to physical sickness.

Now, there's a good reason why they consider that the Greek word used here should refer to physical sickness.

The basic idea of that word is to be weak, to be feeble, to be without strength.

And it can mean physical weakness. It can mean to be feeble physically, to be sick, to be ill. In fact, in the Gospels, this word always refers to the physically weak, the physically sick, some 14 times.

[6:02] But this word can mean other kinds of weakness, to be weak in faith, to be spiritually weak, and feeble. And indeed, 14 times in the epistles, it is used that way, of other than physical weakness.

Let me just give you a couple examples. 1 Corinthians 8, 9. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak.

That's our word here in James 5. The weak. And in this passage, 1 Corinthians 8, 9, he's clearly not talking about physical weakness. Don't be a stumbling block to the brothers around you who have got the flu.

No, he's talking about being weak in faith, as the context shows. Being weak in conscience. Now, this word here also has other forms of the word.

There's an adjectival and a noun form of this word. And they too have this range of meaning that both includes physical weakness and spiritual weakness.

[7:13] Romans 5, 6. When we were still powerless. There's our word in James 5, 14. When we were still sick. When we were still powerless.

Without strength. Christ died for the ungodly. And here Paul is not saying that we had some physical malady. He is saying we were without strength spiritually. 1 Thessalonians 5, 14.

And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle. Encourage the timid. Help the weak. That's our word. Again, the word is pointing to spiritual weakness.

Now, in the historical narrative sections of the Gospels, this word is most often pointing to physical weakness, physical sickness.

But in the epistles, the opposite is true. That its meaning is most often other than physical weakness. It is rather a spiritual weakness.

[8:15] A spiritual sickness. Of some kind. Well, with that said, which is it here? This word has this range of meaning.

You see, the translator's task is not always easy. It's not that there was always a one for one correspondence between languages. That one word in the Greek has one word meaning in the English.

If it were, many of these issues would be over and would not fill the pages of commentaries. But rather, this one word in the Greek has a range of meaning in English that includes not only physical weakness, but spiritual weakness and other weakness as well.

I'm glad that not all passages in Scripture are this difficult. Indeed, not all passages in James are this difficult.

Peter said, put us on notice that there are some Scriptures that are hard to understand. And I believe this certainly qualifies.

[9:21] Well, let me tell you what I believe today. You may convince me otherwise tomorrow and I'll be up here next week with a different word for you.

With the present light I have, I believe James is here speaking of spiritual weakness, a broader category of weakness. If there's the physical involved, it's not the primary intent of James.

The whole concern of this section then that we're looking at, verses 13 through 18, is not, I believe, physical sickness at all, but spiritual weakness.

Now, I rarely break like this from the preponderance of translators and commentaries, so let me tell you why I have here. I want to walk you through something of my process in seeking to know what is the mind of God?

What is God saying here to us through James 5, 14, and 16? As long as I followed the track of physical sickness and physical oil being anointed on the sick person and physical healing following, as long as I went down that track, I kept bumping into huge problems.

[10:47] problems that all the commentators and all the king's horses and all the king's men cannot make sense of, and just to read them is to see that.

They've got a problem. They disagree with each other over and over. Many of them face the problem head on. It's hard to ignore an elephant in your living room, and some said that this was one of the most problematic portions in the New Testament, and on the surface of it, I thought, that's strange for this epistle of James.

James is a pretty straightforward, easy to understand, if not hard to obey, epistle, isn't it? It's hard-hitting, but there it is, and I thought, that's a bit strange, and I was not at all satisfied with the commentators' way around their problems.

James makes an unconditional promise here about the sick, if you go that route, over whom the elders come and pour oil, that the sick person will get well, and there are some commentators that say, therefore, that this passage only belonged to the apostolic age when the gift of healing was still in use, but then again, the passage is addressed to not the apostles to come and to pray over, but the elders of the church, and James envisions the situation, not with apostles, but with local elders in each of these churches scattered around the world, and so I had to part with many commentators who said this is a passage that has really not concern with 21st century Bremen, but it was rather first century Christianity when God still gave the gift of healing to apostles and their workmen.

I listened to one preacher, went to him thinking, yeah, maybe he can give me light. I found light from him before, a good brother that most of you would appreciate, and he went the way of the physical sickness, and he laid out several of the problems, what he thought were some of the best solutions, which in the end he could not totally buy into, and he ended up with little that he could say for sure that this even means for us.

[13:10] The one who has opened up this vein of understanding for me is John MacArthur, pastor of Grace Community Church, and I read his study guide on the letters to James early on in my preparation and really set aside his view.

It's interesting, but I don't know that I would agree. Look at everybody else is over here, and here he is out on the West Coast, you know. So I really paid little attention, but when I went back and read his whole sermon, not just this study guide, and when I did the homework in the languages for myself, I finally found light in what had been my darkness.

And when I translated this word in James 5.14, not as physical sickness, but as spiritual sickness, as weariness and weakness, not only was it true to the range of meaning of the biblical words used, but it made sense of the whole passage, and I found those big problems just really evaporating.

And I ended up with another clear and helpful message from James that makes sense of the context. And so I ask you to at least consider this before you reject it.

As I said to you, I believe it this morning with the light I have to be God's word and the meaning of it. I start by reminding myself we're in the epistles and not historical narratives of gospels, and so we should not just take it for granted that this is physical sickness.

[15:03] We should rather keep the option open for spiritual weakness, since that is the way the epistles most often translate this word, and it refers to spiritual and other weakness.

And then just before this section on prayer, James has been calling the believers to patient perseverance in the face of suffering. So now I'm looking at the broader context of this passage. What's gone before? Be patient, brothers. Under unjust treatment, when you're suffering, still be patient, still persevere, like Job or like the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

And it's not hard to think that under the pressures and stresses from without and from within, persecutions from the world, temptations from the devil who loves to kick us when we're down, temptations from our own evil desires that James has talked about in this letter, that in such a context of troubles and trials and warfare, as James portrays, well, we could understand how saints could be brought to such a state of weariness and weakness, spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and yes, even physically, though that's not the emphasis of the passage.

Here they are. They're worn and weary. They're spiritually sick. They fall into this spiritual numbness and sleepy lethargy where they're all out of strength to fight another day.

[16:38] They get up to another day to face that same burden for the thousandth time. It's gone nowhere. The same old temptation to sin that so often has entangled you and beat you up.

The battle has worn you down. You're feeling defeated. You're giving into temptation and unbelief. And there's no more strength of will to persevere in doing the hard right.

I say that fits the context of where James has just taken us. And it's no longer a hypothetical situation. This is life in the real world where the Christian must live out this pursuit of holiness.

We get there, don't we? But we're so low that we feel like we're down for the count. And James knows it.

And he says to us, is any one of you weak? Is any one of you weak and feeble and without strength? Sick is okay.

[17 : 39] I'm just taking it to be sick of heart and weak in heart. The old reformer William Tyndale was the one English translation that broke with the herd of physical sickness.

Number Tyndale gave his life that he might give to us English speakers the New Testament. He was tied to the stake and a rope put around his neck.

He was hung and then burned to a crisp for translating and disseminating the New Testament into the language that you and I are speaking.

Oh, we're privileged to have our Bibles. And William Tyndale comes to James 5.14 and he knew the range of the Greek word and the range of its meaning in English and you know how he translated it?

Is any of you defeated? Weak and worn down and low and defeated without strength and so feeble?

[18 : 51] Well, you know you should pray. Verse 13 told you that. When in trouble, pray. But you're so weak you can hardly even pray. You ever been there? Your prayers feel like they don't make it through the ceiling and you've prayed and prayed but nothing seems to change.

What do you do then in such weakness? James tells us he should call for the elders of the church to come and pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

It's like a tag team. You find yourself worn out and exhausted to the point of being without strength. You call in the elders of the church.

You solicit their prayers to come on and to help you. And I have seen believers trying to fight spiritual battles by themselves and failing and failing and failing and only finding help when they called another to come alongside and pray with them and for them.

Elders here in verse 14 and 15 as we'll see next week Lord willing verse 16 each other one another but here it's the elders of the church. Call the elders of the church.

[20 : 08] Now we elders are not looking for more work to do unless it's the work the Lord calls us to do and this is it. This is part of our job description. Elders are shepherds of local churches charged with caring for the spiritual needs of its members watching over God's flock which he bought with his own blood and no small part of our ministry is to watch over you on our knees to pray for you.

Like Epaphras we should be always wrestling for you in prayer. Colossians 4.12 Like Paul who is always praying for all the churches like Jesus ever interceding for his people.

In Acts chapter 6 and verse 4 the reason deacons were added to the church in Jerusalem to take care of the needs of the widows was so that the spiritual leadership of the church could give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.

notice the priority of prayer. That's what spiritual leaders are to do for their church. They are to pray for their people.

Yes they're to minister the word but they're to pray. And notice in James it's not just praying for you in the privacy of our studies.

[21 : 35] Yes there will be much of that but it's saying that there are special times when we are to pray over you. That speaks of our physical presence with you called alongside of you to seek the Lord with you.

Call the elders of the church to pray over you. And notice the initiative is to be yours brethren. You see that? You're to call.

You're to call. You're to invite. You're to request this. You have our phone numbers. Let me urge you to call us. Call us.

And when you do know this that you are not calling us from our work but to our work. Oh I've heard some of you say you know I just don't want to bother you pastor.

Bother us. That's why Jesus Christ has made us overseers in this church that we might pray and sometimes come alongside you and pray over you right there with you.

[22 : 50] That's not calling us apart from our that's saying come and do your work. So so call us call us. This is part of our God given assignment and privilege.

It's New Testament Christianity according to James the brother of our Lord. So the elders are to come and to pray. Well what about the anointing with oil in the name of the Lord?

Well I thought you might ask so I've some have made this anointing with oil to be a symbolic ceremony that the elders are to perform over the weak man or the sick man as he's often taken to be physically sick.

a couple drops of oil on the forehead symbolizing God's grace and healing. To take that view of things would make this the only passage in the word of God where elders are given this command to answer the cry of people to come and pray and to do just that to anoint with oil that says be careful we don't have parallel passages where elders are told this in other places proceed cautiously the word here for anoint a means to rub down it means to oil to pour to anoint nowhere does it mean to dot the forehead with a drop of oil you remember Jesus taking the people to task because when they fasted they left their faces all disfigured and their hair disheveled and they wanted everybody to know oh he's fasting today look at him and so they fasted to be seen of men and Jesus says no when you fast put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you're fasting but to your father in heaven who will reward you mark 16 1 the women came to the tune to anoint the body of Jesus with their spices to pack his body full with pound after pound of spices remember the woman of ill repute that came into the house where Jesus was dining with the

Pharisee and she washed Jesus feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair and kissed them and poured anointed them with perfume it was part of the hospitality that was shown to guests in the Middle East to pour oil on their head and Jesus rebuked the Pharisee and said when I came in you didn't put any oil on my head she has anointed my feet poured oil on my feet John 11 and John 12 it was Mary the brother the sister of Lazarus who poured out her perfume on Jesus feet anointed same word anointed Jesus feet and wiped them with her hair and even in the anointing of the priests in the Old Testament it's interesting that Psalm 133 too tells us that the oil wasn't just a couple dots on the priests but the precious oil ran down the beard of

[26 : 26] Aaron and fell down onto the collar of his robes to anoint means to rub to pour to oil someone away away away away to in symbolic ceremony, but to oil him with oil, to pour, to rub him down with oil in the name of the Lord.

What about this oil? Olive oil was one of the best remedies known at that time. Used both internally and externally. And its health-giving effects are still known all over the world.

We had a couple old aunts on our, Joseph's side of the family that lived to a good old age, and they would say that their oil of herbs would care about anything.

In fact, if you bump your head at our house, you're liable to still get some oil. Put on your head. It's a well-known fact that this oil was used for healing.

And so in Bible times, those who were sick were oiled with oil. They were anointed with oil.

Remember Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan. When he meets the man who's been beaten and left half dead, what does he do?

[27 : 46] He pulls out his first aid kit, and he finds wine and oil. And before he bandages the man up, he pours in the wine as the antiseptic from the alcohol to cleanse the wound, and the oil to soothe and promote healing.

Oil was used after a bath to moisten the skin. It was rubbed into dry, parched skin that was damaged by the eastern sun. It was part of the normal hospitality that a host would give to his guests, applying it to the head, or maybe even the feet after they'd washed the feet.

Athletes would be rubbed down with oil to refresh and restore sore muscles. I want to be clear that your elders are not going to open a massage parlor to rub down your sore muscles.

But that's how oil was used in the first century when James was writing. But it is the ministry of your elders. And hear me.

to come alongside you when you are weak and to pray over you and to pray in such a way that you will be anointed with oil, refreshed, revived, strengthened, stimulated, encouraged, healed, and made well.

[29 : 18] The elders, by their ministry of prayer, are to do for this man's spiritual weakness what a doctor might do for a body's physical weakness.

Their prayers are to do for his soul what oil would do for his body. And again, our New International Version doesn't show that the main verb in the sentence is to pray.

And the anointing is a participle. Call for the elders of the church to pray over you. Anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. Describing what the praying is doing.

The praying is to be as an anointing, oiling with oil. Now, I've taken this then in a metaphorical sense. Not a literal sense to bring oil and to rub down the parishioner. And that's not rare in Scripture. In Isaiah chapter 1 and verse 6, Isaiah says, From the sole of your foot to the top of your head there's no soundness, no health.

[30 : 28] Only wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil. What was Isaiah saying?

He's writing to Judah and the whole nation was spiritually sick. But he doesn't say that. Instead, he says, You've got wounds all over your body that are open and have not been soothed with oil. You've not had the remedy poured in upon you. He uses the physical in a metaphorical way to address the spiritual malady. You're left without the soothing oil.

And he calls them to come to Christ and to trust in the Lord's provision for the sickness of sin. Psalm 23 and verse 5, What does David say about his good shepherd? Thou anointest my head with oil. Perhaps the picture that David envisions is of sheep grazing out on the hills all day long and at night they're called into the sheep pen and there's just one narrow opening to the sheep pen and all the sheep must pass through and the shepherd's there with his rod and as they pass under his rod, he examines each one of his sheep.

[31 : 54] And where he sees a wound, he pours oil to soothe it, to promote healing. Maybe it's got a thorn in its foot and he sees it's limping and he picks up the little foot and he removes the thorn and pours in the oil.

Maybe that's the picture here. And David says, Thou anointest my head with oil. He doesn't say, You do for me what oil does for the sheep.

But I believe that's what he's saying. He's speaking in a metaphorical sense here. You refresh me and soothe me and delight me and restore me just like oil that's poured over the head.

And any shepherd over the flock of God, any elder, should be prepared to do no less to wounded and weary and weakened sheep to so pray with them that the effect would be that their head would be anointed with oil and they would be strengthened, healed, restored, refreshed, encouraged, and yes, we'll see, even forgiven.

Or to change the imagery, the church is to be a hospital on the battlefield and its elders are the doctors called to come alongside the wounded, weakened, defeated soldier and to heal them by prayer and to send them back out into the fray stronger in the Lord and in his mighty power.

[33 : 21] that's the role of the elder in the local church. He needs to do it all in the name of the Lord with his authority and in his place on his behalf.

And notice the twofold promise given to the prayer of faith. First of all, notice that he says it's the prayer offered in faith that will have this twofold effect.

The prayer offered in faith. Now again, some of the commentators when they go the route of the physical healing, they bump into this and they say, now, what is this? Is this some special kind of faith that someone has that they believe that the Lord is certainly going to heal this person?

Well, that's one of the problems and they go all the way around that thing and, but for James, have we not seen that the only kind of prayer that gets the ear of heaven is the prayer of faith?

It's believing prayer. What did he say in chapter 1 and verse 6 after he tells us to ask for wisdom? But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt.

[34 : 33] That would be a prayer of faith, a prayer offered in faith. Because anyone who doubts, it's like a wave of the sea and blown and tossed by the wind. Let not that man think he will receive anything from the Lord.

Now, this is no special faith to believe that this parishioner that we're praying for is definitely going to be healed from their sickness. It is the prayer offered in faith.

Where there's no faith, there's no prayer. For he who comes to God must believe that he exists and that he is the rewarder of those who earnestly seek him. Hebrews 11, 6.

Prayer is the exercise. All true prayer is the exercise of faith in God. We lay hold of the unseen God. We believe he's there. We believe he's listening. So we talk to him.

Prayer lays hold of his person, his character, his power, his goodness, his love, his willingness to give his open ear. Prayer lays hold of his promises that sometimes seem to be so far removed from the realities that we're living with or that you, some of our members, are living with.

[35 : 47] And so we lay hold of the promises by faith and prayer. And it is the prayer offered in faith that will have this two-fold promise given. Number one, the result will be restored strength for the

weary.

Restored strength for the weary. Verse 15 says, and the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise him up. You say, ah, see again, it says the sick person.

Well, here again, the translators have followed their earlier decision to consider that this is talking about physical sickness. This is not the same word that was used back in verse 14 as anyone sick. It's a different word that its basic meaning is to be weary, fatigued in spirit, to faint, to be worn out to the point of being weary of life, tired of living.

It's only used one other place in the Bible. So I invite you to turn to it. It's just back a few pages to Hebrews chapter 12. And it's found in verse 3.

[36 : 57] Our translators have translated it the sick person. The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person. What is the translation of camnonta?

Well, here in Hebrews 12.3, Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men so that you will not grow weary.

Not grow weary, there's our word, and lose heart. Again, the idea is spiritual weakness.

It's not the author's concern here that these Hebrew Christians might get physically sick. So consider Christ so that you don't get sick.

No, that's not his concern. His concern is that they not grow weary, which is the main meaning of this word. Spiritual weariness.

[37 : 55] And it's interesting that the context here in Hebrews 12 is really similar to the end of the book of James. As we saw last Sunday evening in this chapter, Hebrews 12, in the midst of suffering and persecution, the Hebrew Christians were in danger of growing weary and losing heart.

Spiritually. And so they needed to fix their eyes on Jesus, verse 2. They need to consider him, verse 3, so that they won't grow weary. This is the only way to persevere in running a race, the race marked out for us.

And here are the people in trouble in Hebrews 12 and lost sight of Christ. Their eyes were on their troubles. Their eyes were on themselves.

Their diminished resources, their weakness, but their eyes weren't on Christ. And this points the way for the visiting elders as they pray and minister the word to their weakened flock, the weakened sheep, that they need to point you back to Christ.

To pray you back to a place where Christ is front and center with you. Where his person and work is amazing you again. Where his enduring the cross is thrilling you.

[39 : 13] Where his life and power is filling you. And so, as we saw last Sunday night here in Hebrews 12 down in verses 12 and 13, speak of the restoration of these weakened Christians.

And notice how he speaks of them in metaphorical terms just like James does. Verse 12, Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees.

The concern of the author is not that he had some in the congregation who literally had knee problems and arm problems and he wants them to start working out and physically strengthening these legs and knees and arms.

No, he's concerned about their spiritual weakness and weariness. So he says, come on, I want you to be strengthened. And so he tells them and speaks to them in physical terms, doesn't he?

Strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. They were limping along in the Christian life when they should have been running. And so they need to look to Jesus and endure hardship as his loving discipline.

[40 : 22] They need to submit to God in their trials. They need to cast off all hindrances and sin. Verse 13 of Hebrews 12, they need to make level paths for your feet so that the lame may not be disabled but rather healed.

It's the same word used in James 5 and verse 16 that we'll look at next week. Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.

Folks, it's not speaking here of physical healing for weak arms and knees. It's talking about a spiritual condition that's pictured by the guy limping along. And that is what I believe James is doing in a very similar context where you've got people suffering like Job and suffering like the prophets for their faith and they're growing weary and weak and they need to be strengthened.

And the prayer of faith will make the weary fatigued one well. That's the first promise of James chapter 5 and verse 15.

It will make the weak person well. It will save him. It's the word *sozo*, the common word for salvation in the New Testament. And here it refers to delivering him and rescuing him from some danger or difficulty as it's often used.

[41:48] And so the Lord will deliver him from his weakness. And then notice it says the Lord will raise him up. The word means to raise up, to arouse, to stir up, to awaken, to lift.

The brother has fallen down. The Lord will raise him up. He's low. The Lord will lift him up. He's defeated and lethargic. The Lord will stir him up and arouse him.

His strength may be gone. His faith may be weak. His zeal may be spent. His will to fight on non-existent. But he calls the elders of the church to come and pray over him and to oil him with oil in the name of the Lord.

And the Lord will raise him up and restore him to strength, a state of strength. Notice it's not the elders who raise him up. It's not some oil that does the trick.

It is the Lord himself. He's personally involved in this weak Christian's life. That's what believing prayer does. It engages the Lord Jesus to personally act on behalf of the fallen, to put forth fresh grace and power, to raise him back to strength.

[43:07] faith. We have a picture, an illustration of this. I believe in Jesus, the account of Jesus in the Gospels.

I don't say that this is why it was written, but I'm using it to illustrate the point. Remember the man that was paralyzed? He couldn't walk to get to Jesus, so four of his friends carried him to Jesus. But when they got there, they had a problem. The house where he was ministering was so full that they couldn't get in. Oh, but their faith was stronger than that. And so they clambered up to the top of the roof and broke open the tiles and lowered the man down in front of Jesus.

You know what Jesus said? You know what Mark says in Mark 2? when Jesus saw their faith. Doesn't say when he saw his faith. Perhaps his faith was included, but it's plural.

When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the man, your sins are forgiven, and he said to the man, rise up, take up your mat and go.

[44:22] He healed him. There may be times when you're so beat up and weakened in the faith that you need to call the elders to pray with you.

Call them. They should have faith at least enough to pray, to lay hold of God. But let me say, your elders need other elders to pray for them because we don't always have strong faith either.

And we sometimes are the one who needs to call the elder to pray with us. The elders' faith, though, is to lay hold of Jesus Christ in prayer. And by doing so, what are we doing?

We're carrying the weakened brother before the Lord. And you come before the Lord, riding as it were on the wings of their prayers, brought to Jesus.

We can bring you to Jesus by our prayers. And Jesus, in answer to our prayers, will put forth fresh grace and power to lift you up and to restore you to strength.

[45:32] The believing prayer will secure help for the weakened believer. This promise is to make us bold in asking.

That's the first thing promised. And the second is, if he has sinned, he will be forgiven. If he has sinned, well, yes, sometimes the root cause of our spiritual weakness and weariness is sin.

And sin saps us of spiritual strength. David's sin of adultery and murder caused him to know this reality. And before he acknowledged and confessed his sin, he says, when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For night and day, your hand was heavy upon me and my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. And there is a spiritual sapping of strength that sin does. It's like a cancer that feeds on the vital organs of a man.

It weakens him. That sin. And so it's in the context of calling the elders to come and to pray with you in your weakened state that often if there is a sin that is at the cause will be seen and prayed for and confessed and grace pled for and forgiveness granted by God.

[46:54] Other times it's not the root cause. It may be a contributing cause to our weakness and weariness. Maybe the cause was the crushing persecution and unjust treatment we're receiving. And yet in that situation the devil still tempts us and kicks us when we're down.

And the flesh chafens under the yoke and unbelief sets in and the fleshly response is sometimes mixed with the suffering itself and further contributes to our weakness and defeated condition.

So call the elders of the church have them pray over you and not only will you be raised up by the Lord he'll also forgive you of any sins in the matter come to the surface all sin must be thrown off everything that hinders because it pulls us further down it weakens us further and there can never be full restoration to health without the dealing with sin is that not James is that not where he's been for five chapters in his all-out war on sin so if we confess our sins he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness well if this is what James is getting at then this is not something that is only found here in our New Testament this is something that's found all over the New Testament this is what elders are called to those who are spiritual are to gently restore the one that's fallen and weak and lift him up though that's not just elders it surely includes elders and one of the qualifications of an elder is to so hold firmly to the trustworthy message that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and were to instruct others gently that they might be restored and set loose from the snare of the devil who's taken them captive to do his will and part of this work is to be done in prayer so I say seeing the sickness here in verse 14 as spiritual and not physical

I believe fits the context of these verses it builds on the general principle is any one of you in trouble he should pray that's step one pray when you're in trouble but if you're growing weary in the fight and need for their health call in the air support call the elders of the church to pray for you and that's step two and next week we'll see step three and that's to make use of your brothers and sisters one another in this battle confessing your sins to each other and praying for each other that you may be healed now if after hearing this you still believe this is a reference to physical healing and want me or the elders to come and pray over you when you're sick oh by all means call us we will want to do that with you that is another time that we are to care for you what even if you see this as a passage referring to spiritual weakness that is another time when you're physically weak and often the physical and spiritual weakness go together and emotional weakness and so on we're glad to come and pray for you just don't expect a massage with oil and don't expect an absolute guarantee that the

Lord will raise you up from your sick bed I don't see that in my New Testament but we will lay hold of a kind and merciful heavenly father and we will plead his promises for you and we will claim that he will do you nothing but good and if healing is not it something better for you today the need to call for the elders of the church to come and pray when you're spiritually weak maybe some of you are reticent to call us and perhaps that's our fault maybe we're not taking enough interest in you personally that you feel comfortable calling calling us when you're spiritually weak forgive me pray for me I want every one of you to be encouraged to call me to call pastor Aaron call pastor Bob to ask for prayer maybe we need to encourage you to do so

[51:35] I'm doing that now please call us we stand ready to come and to pray and to lay hold of the Lord Jesus who promises to lift you up maybe some of the fault is yours but you don't think you need the prayers of your elders or of others your brothers and sisters God says through James that there are times in your life when you need the prayers of your elders to come and pray!

especially when you're in a weakened state that's the situation here maybe some of you are in that state right now don't let your pride hold you back don't let your fears hold you back and stop you do what James says you to do call us to come and pray over you and examine yourself confess any sins that the Lord points out to you you know the Lord loves to raise up the fallen he loves to forgive sins that's what we're never to forget all of his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases he's ready this morning if you are cry out to him if you're not a Christian this morning oh do you see your need for the Lord if this is the state of Christian saved people who can get so low in spiritual sin and sickness that they're that weak what of you my friend who are shot through a sin and have no cure and no remedy come to

Jesus the great position of souls and he'll forgive you and he'll heal you of all your sins let's pray together Lord I confess that this is a passage that has had me perplexed and whether I have taken the right interpretation of the wrong I do see elsewhere in the New Testament that as an elder of the church I am called and we are called to expend ourselves in prayer for the flock that you have purchased with your own blood so help us help me to grow in this grace and this ministry of grace to this congregation help them to find it easy to pick up the phone and to call us and to share their burdens that we might carry them with them and to come and to pray take us further into New Testament Christianity overcome all that stands in the way take away all that is not of your mind let nothing that has been of your mind escape us thank you Jesus that you do heal all of our

diseases thank you that you forgive all our sins and we pray in your name amen