



Praying for Personal Healing

ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, May 13, 1992, a wonderful miracle took place on the campus of Southern Adventist University (SAU). By definition, every miracle is wonderful, but this was the most remarkable one I've ever seen! A young woman, oppressed by Satan for 18 years, was driving home and felt impressed to pull into the SAU parking lot and attend a prayer service in Pierson Chapel. Listening to testimonies of those who had been healed by God's power, she felt a ray of hope. As she knelt in prayer that evening, the Lord spoke these life-changing words to her: "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And she responded in faith.

Instantly, the dark shadow that had enshrouded her soul was lifted, and she was healed. Her whole countenance changed. Her face shone with a holy light, and she began to lift her voice in praise to God. Those who heard her testimony were filled with awe. Her husband wept for joy—she was healed by the power of the Living God.

Many healing miracles are recorded in Scripture. Mark 6:13 says the disciples "anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."¹ The disciples were following Christ's specific instructions to preach the gospel and

“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.”

James 5:14, NKJV

heal the sick. So, it is logical that the teachings on anointing the sick come from Jesus himself. He is the Source of this sacred service.

Jesus prophesied in Mark 16:18 that His followers would place their hands on the sick and the sick would be healed. But can those same miracles of healing happen in these last days of earth's history? I believe the answer is YES—those same miracles can happen today.

In James 5:14-17, we discover the outline of a special service for those who desire to open their lives to God's healing presence. It is often called an anointing service, or prayer for the sick. Several important principles emerge from this text.

First, this special service is for sick believers. It says, “Is anyone *among you* sick?” God will not heal the unbeliever just so they can continue in a life of sin. It is not a magical rite for anyone who can pay the price. Neither will God heal a person who deliberately continues to transgress natural or spiritual laws. This service is for confessing, repentant believers. Confessing our sins is an essential preparation for this special service, along with deep, heartfelt repentance and surrender of our lives to the will of God. The Bible says, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Ps. 66:18, KJV).

Second, James 5:14 tells us that the anointing service is for those who are sick. It does not specifically define what kind of sickness. It simply says, “Is anyone among you *sick*?” The Greek verb used here is *astheneō*, which literally means “weak or feeble.”² We usually assume that this means physical sickness, which certainly applies. But what about emotional or spiritual sickness? What if someone is physically well but emotionally scarred by attacks from Satan? Does not God desire also to heal that person? I believe the Holy Spirit inspired James to use this specific word, *astheneō*, because it has a broad meaning. It leaves room for whatever healing God has ordained. We should also notice that the verb translated “sick” does not necessarily imply a life-threatening illness. This dispels the common misconception that you must be terminally ill, or breathing your last breath, before you can request an anointing service.

Third, the anointing service should be requested. We read, “let [him/her] call the elders of the church.” God wants to offer us the miracle of healing, and He is able. But we must be willing. We must be open to His miracle-working power in our lives. The only exception I can think of would be when believing parents request anointing for their young child or a believing spouse, relative, or friend requests anointing for a loved one who is physically unable to request it themselves. But we *must* ask. We must take hold of the promise of God. It's a solemn thought to consider that God may have been willing and ready to heal you for years but you haven't given Him the opportunity. You have not yet given Him the invitation to manifest His healing power in Your life.

Fourth, we anoint the person with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will heal the sick. The text literally reads, “having anointed with

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oil, the prayer of faith will make the sick person whole.”³ Notice that it is the *prayer of faith* that opens life to the healing power of God. Jesus said in Matthew 9:22, “Your faith has made you well,” and again in Matthew 9:29, “According to your faith let it be to you” (NKJV). The anointing oil is a sacred symbol representing the ministry of the Holy Spirit, but it contains no magical power. There have been many miracles of healing in response to prayers of faith when anointing oil was not available. What is essential is the prayer of faith that opens your life to the healing power of God.



It is interesting to note that the Greek verb used in “a prayer offered in faith will heal the sick” (NLT), is not the common verb for “heal” (*therapeuō*) but is the verb *sodzō*, which is usually translated “to save” but can also be translated “to heal, to make whole.” It is used in reference to the healing of Jairus’ daughter in Mark 5:23, in the healing of the demoniac possessed by Legion in Luke 8:36, and in the healing of the man crippled from birth in Acts 14:9.

The thrilling truth contained in James 5 is that healing is certain when we

come in faith. The text says, “The prayer offered in faith *will* make the sick person well; the Lord *will* raise them up. If they have sinned, they *will* be forgiven.” There is nothing tentative about this. It does not say it might happen, or it could happen—it says it *will happen!*

We must conclude, then, that in response to the prayer of faith, God *will* give the healing He ordains—in harmony with His will and our ultimate good. It may not always be the healing that we expect, but it will be the healing God knows is best.

During the early Advent movement, Ellen White recognized times when they may have erred in this regard. She writes:

“In these prayers we thought we must be positive, and if we exercised faith, that we must ask for nothing less than life. We dared not say, ‘If it will glorify God,’ fearing it would admit a semblance of doubt. We have anxiously watched those who have been given back, as it were, from the dead. We have seen some of these, especially youth, raised to health, and they have forgotten God, become dissolute in life, causing sorrow and anguish to parents and friends, and have become shame to those who feared to pray. They lived not to honor and glorify God, but to curse Him with their lives of vice.”⁴

Early Advent believers learned a lesson from these experiences. Ellen continues, “We no longer . . . seek to bring the Lord to our wishes. . . . Our petitions must not take the form of a command but of intercession. . . .”⁵

So we should pray, “Not our will, but Yours be done.” And we ask for discernment to notice the marvelous work He *has* done. A person may be raised up immediately, or over time, or not until the resurrection. But His promise is sure. He will raise us up! And that is good news! If a person who is physically sick is not restored to health immediately, or over time, he or she will be healed in spirit and given strength and courage to bear the adversity in ways that bring honor and glory to God.

Not only that, but when we come in faith, *spiritual healing* is guaranteed. The Word of God says, “If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”

In reference to this sacred service, Ellen White writes, “The divine Healer is present in the sick-room; He hears every word of the prayers offered to Him in the simplicity of true faith. His disciples today are to pray for the sick, as verily as did the disciples of old. And there will be recoveries; for ‘the prayer of faith shall save the sick.’”⁶

I am not suggesting an anointing for every minor physical, emotional, or spiritual ailment. Nor am I suggesting you should never seek the care of physicians, therapists, or counselors.

I am saying this: Do not forget that God is a miracle worker. Do not leave God out of the picture. Listen to this appeal from Ellen White:

“Why is it that men are so unwilling to trust Him who created man, and who can, by a touch, a word, a look, heal all manner of disease? Who is more worthy of our confidence than the One who has made so great a sacrifice for our redemption? Our Lord has given us definite instruction, through the apostle James, as to our duty in case of sickness. When human help fails, God will be the helper of His people.”⁷

Lois was serving as my administrative assistant when she came to my office with a request. Her lungs were failing, and she wanted to know if she could call the

elders and be anointed in the name of the Lord. I was touched both by her humble submission to the will of God and also her earnest desire to serve as long as the Lord gave her strength. A small group gathered at the front of the Forest Lake Church sanctuary. We reviewed the clear teaching of the Word of God and rejoiced in His faithfulness and love. I do not recall which elder actually led out in the service. It does not even matter. The blessing came directly from the throne room of God. Lois was healed. There was such an improvement in her health that she no longer needed to take any medications for her lungs. Many years later, Lois is still praising God for His mercies that are new every morning!

Lois’ healing is one of many miracles I’ve witnessed as we humbly take God at His Word, praying for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. If you have experienced miraculous blessings in your life, take time today, and every day, to praise God with your whole heart, as you remember what He has done for you. And share this with others—there are so many who need to hear that our God is a miracle-working God.

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¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the New International Version (emphasis supplied).

² See 1 Cor. 11:30.

³ Author’s paraphrase.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health* (Mountain Views, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1957), pp. 378, 379.

⁵ Ibid, p. 379.

⁶ White, *Gospel Workers* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 215.

⁷ White, *The Faith I Live By* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1973), p. 315 (emphasis supplied).

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