

# Shall We Pray For The Sick?

## Bible Answers About Miracles

The great people of God in every generation are those Christians who pray. These people do not necessarily talk most about prayer, advertise their belief in prayer or try to explain everything about prayer. God's truly great people are those humble and dedicated Christians who actually take time and pray.

We are commanded to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17). As Matthew Henry pointed out, "We should keep up stated times for prayer, and continue instant in prayer. We should pray always, and not faint: pray without weariness, and continue in prayer, till we come to that world where prayer shall be swallowed up in praise. The meaning is not that men should do nothing but pray, but that nothing else we do should hinder prayer in its proper season. Prayer will help forward and not hinder all other lawful business, and every good work." It is through the avenue of prayer that one shows his reliance upon God and by which his needs and supplications are expressed.

Yet it is from this very point that divisions begin to emerge concerning prayer and praying for the sick. Many in the religious world believe that miraculous healing occurs as a result of prayer. This demonstrates that they do not understand God's purpose for miracles or His design for prayer. To hold the position that miracles continue today, and come forth as a result of prayer, is a gross abuse of the sacred writings. They either intentionally or unwittingly are guilty of, "handling the word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor. 4:2). Please request the tract "Are Miracles Being Performed Today" in order to read a discussion regarding this matter. The Bible is clear that miraculous powers ceased (1 Cor. 12:1-2; 13:8-13). If only one of the nine gifts of the Spirit listed in 1 Corinthians 12 were present today, such as the gift of healing" (1 Cor. 12:9), then by implication all of them would have to be present. Yet we have not witnessed a resurrection from the dead for nearly 2000 years! Today, we have "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3; cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The faithful child of God will accept the biblical teaching that prayer and providence go together rather than prayer and miracles. The Christian will pray for the sick with the understanding that God will work within the framework of natural law in order that a prayer may be answered, if the Lord wills. (Lk. 22:42; Jas. 4:15).

It has been stated that, "The providence of God concerns itself with the preservation, care, and government which God exercises over everything that he has created, in order that they may accomplish the purpose for which they were created." At one time God fed the multitudes manna from heaven (Ex. 16). God still feeds us today; but it is through the seed, the sower, the rain, the sunshine, and the harvest that brings forth our bread. Yes, we are to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11), but surely no one expects loaves of baked bread to rain down on us from heaven. This same principle should be understood when we pray for the sick. Yes, we are to pray for

those who have infirmities and that they may recover, if the Lord wills (Eph. 6:18). However, God works providentially through natural laws—the doctors, nurses, medicines, technologies, as well as the prayers of the saints. Guy N. Woods said it well when he wrote, “He who is raised up from death’s door by modern drugs is as assuredly healed by the power of God as were those in the first century who were the recipients of Christ’s healing ministry of that day.” (Questions and Answers, Freed-Hardeman College, 1976, Vol. 1, p. 144). Surely we can understand that if God suspended natural laws to heal miraculously for just one person, He would no longer be a just and impartial God. Rather He would be a “respector of persons” (Acts 10:34).

What about the statement by James when he said, “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? 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: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him” (James 5:13-15).

First, the salvation here is not salvation from physical illness. The condition here is that of spiritual weakness. Notice the comment by Vine, “2. kamno: primarily, “to work,” hence, from the effect of constant work, “to be weary,” Heb. 12:3, is rendered “(him) that is sick,” in Jas. 5:15, RV, KJV “(the) sick.” The choice of this verb instead of the repetition of No. 1 v. 14, , is suggestive of the common accompaniment of “sickness,” weariness of mind (which is the meaning of this verb), which not infrequently hinders physical recovery; hence this special cause is here intimated in the general idea of “sickness.” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words). A good translation then of the passage would be, “Is any weak among you? 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. And the prayer of faith shall save the weary one and the Lord shall raise him up and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

If this referred to miraculous powers of the elders then the elders would have had power in healing that even the apostles did not exercise. Physical healing was a miraculous sign which was done for the purpose of confirming the word (Mk. 16:20; Heb. 2:3-4), and was not done for the personal benefit (per se) of the one being healed or the one doing the healing. Paul did not heal Timothy or Trophimus (1 Tim. 5:23; 2 Tim. 4:20). Paul did not heal himself (Gal. 4:13-15; 2 Cor. 12:7-10). The work of elders is in ruling the church and watching for their souls. It is not in becoming guardians of men’s physical health as either miracle workers or medical doctors.

James assures us that the man who is sick (weary) shall be saved or shall be raised up. This would indicate that there were never any failures. In this healing (weariness) success will always attend. If a man is striving for the spiritual health about which James is teaching, and if he is singing and praying, demonstrating his devotion to God, and if he calls for the help of these righteous men, there will be no failure in raising him up. This person has shown his sincere desire for strength in serving God (“Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms) and when the help is given, he will respond to it and be refreshed in his dedication to the Lord. “If he has committed sins,” then he/she is to confess them and together with others pray for the forgiveness of those sins. The word “faults” in vs. 16 means “a false step, a trespass” (Vine, Vol. II, page 83). The passage in James 5:13-20 pictures the Christian whose trials have taught him patience to such degree that he/she recognizes his/her complete dependence upon God and the need for seeing all life’s affairs in the light of spiritual values. In suffering he will pray; in joy he will sing praises; in discouragement, he will seek encouragement from those qualified to give it; in sin, he will confess and pray for forgiveness; in zeal for truth and moral and spiritual growth, he will work to convert the

erring even while he prays for their salvation. God can and does answer prayers today, according to His will, without miracles. Having faith in God's plan and what He has provided should give us comfort, hope, and strength.

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