

James
**“Always Reforming: Prayers for Healing;
with Comments on the Reformation”**
James 5:12-20

Good evening, everyone. This is the professorial side of me. Okay. So, there's a man named Michael Reeves - Christian scholar, godly man who wrote a book called [Why the Reformation Still Matters](#). It's a wonderful book that guides us through our faith. And I have, decided to just give you a handout. It's not connected to the sermon. It's connected to Reformation Sunday so that you can have your bearings. If you have a conversation with someone who's a Catholic, especially a zealous, well-informed Catholic who's wrestling with what he or she heard in the church. So these are these are two summaries taken from different parts of George Whitfield's wonderful book. He's a man of a faith like ours. So I'm just going to walk you through them. What is justification in the mind of an orthodox Protestant? And what's the justification according to an orthodox, well trained Catholic? Now the caveat is Catholics are reading the Bible more and more and they're sliding over toward biblical views in places. So we're grateful. But I'm talking about official Roman Catholic theology as promulgated by the Pope in his official documents, as opposed to what we believe here in the PCA and in other like minded reformed churches. I'm gonna take three at a time. And here goes the Orthodox Protestant view of justification is, in essence, justification is a forensic act. That is to say, it is an act carried out by God in the judicial realm, and it removes the problem of human guilt. The metaphor is the court. We're standing before God as judge, and he's going to look at the evidence of forensic evidence and declare us innocent or guilty. But what is he going to do? Is see the evidence not of our sin, but of the righteousness of Christ, and impute that to us. And so he's going to say, this man, this woman is just as justified.

The Catholic, on the other hand, in official Catholic theology, says that justification is a healing act. It is from the metaphor of the hospital. God is healing us and is restoring us from the wounds and the sickness of sin. In our terminology, they combine justification and sanctification. You have to be good before God will say you're good. They eradicate imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

Next three the cure for a problem, according to a Protestant is the alien righteousness of Christ. Alien meaning from the outside, not ours, and that righteousness is imputed or counted or reckoned to account, and is received by faith. The Catholic says the main problem is, or sorry. The main cure is the inherent righteousness of believers. That is to say, what we work out day by day and righteousness is slowly imparted by the Holy Spirit and the means of grace.

And it's received by faith and perfected by works and by the sacraments. So if you want to make sure you're right with God, make sure you participate in communion every week and you

confess your sins and you're baptized. And so forth. The next trio, according to us, the time of justification properly is in the future. On the last day, Jesus will describe us as righteousness.

Say, enter into my presence. But he declares, it makes it no now. And he says in advance, this is what I'm saying the last day. I'm letting you know right now that you are just in my sight. And the ground of that is the work of Christ. That's why it's certain, that's all. We can know it now. And that gives us assurance that if we commit some sins at the end of our life, or have a bad run for a couple of weeks, or you're doing something you shouldn't be doing when Christ returns, you are not going to lose your salvation.

A Catholic, by contrast, says justification is future and is unknown now. You cannot know you're right with God. That's the only person who can know they're right with God. According to Catholic theology, is the saint who's received a vision of God, and God has told him or her individually. And the ground of justification is Christ's work. Plus our works.

And it's wrong to even ask for assurance. What you have to do is work it out for yourself. So, to be a little bit sharper even than that. If you ask the question, what do Catholics and Protestants say about each other when they're disagreeing? And I'm not going to hit all of these, but just maybe 5 or 6, the most important ones.

The Protestant says to a Catholic, you preach salvation by works. And the Catholic says, oh no, you ignore the importance of works. And the Protestant says, you take Scripture from the people then and say that the people do not need to read the Bible in their own language, which we talked about a little bit this morning. And the Catholic says, well, you trust the Bible to any interpreter.

You'll let an 11 year old read the Bible on his or her own. That's irresponsible. And skipping down a little bit, the Protestant says that you rob Christ of the prayers that are due to him, and you forget or neglect. How deep is compassion? And sympathy is for us? And the Catholic says, well, you reject the aid of the saints, and the here is the faith.

And that the idea is official. Catholic theology still says, you know, Jesus is high and lifted up and kind of distant from the earth. If you want some real sympathy, go to Mary or go to the saints, because they know what it's like to live on this earth. Jesus was sinless. He doesn't really know. Go to go to the saints. Go to Mary. And we say, you're underestimating the riches and the kindness of Christ. A Protestant who's in a grumpy mood will say that the Catholic Church maintains a corrupt and unbiblical hierarchy headed by a Pope whom God did not appoint. And you deny the priesthood of all believers, which the Bible teaches. And the Catholic says, will you reject God given leaders, the Pope and the bishops and the archbishops given by God to guide us?

And you're indulging in the triumph of the individual. Now, that's a sharp disagreement between Catholics and Protestants. And this is what's been presented to us by Michael Reese. If you're in a conversation with a Catholic and you don't know what's why they're saying what

they're saying, this may be a guide for you. And then the last part is something I've shared with you from the book of James in recent weeks, and I just wanted to make it available to you.

So that's just a teaching moment or seven moments or thereabouts. And if you have Catholic friends and you're wondering why you agree and why you disagree, that might be a little bit of help. You might tuck it in the back of your notebook if you have one. So there are lots of things I like about this church. As I lay my eyes on things, there's always more to find out.

I still don't know where all the offices are. At least I don't know the best way to all them. So I'm always learning things. One of the things I noticed right away that I'm so thankful for is that this is a church that has always had a much, maybe I shouldn't say always. As far back as anybody can remember, there has been a habit of calling on the elders to pray over the sick, and often occurs in the pastor's office between services, and anyone can call on the elders at any time to pray over a serious illness.

And I want to speak about that tonight. we're working our way through James in the morning, mostly, but since we left James in the morning for Reformation Sunday, which I was glad to do, I thought it would be good to talk about James chapter five tonight. Now I want to read the scripture James five verses 13 to 22.

You'll be focusing on 13 to 18 from the NIV. I just think the NIV really nails it in my opinion having studied James very hard and looked at a variety of translations, but before I read it, I want to make sure that we know that one of the themes that Pastor Parks referred to this morning of the Reformation is always reforming. You know, we have the sola, sola, gracia, sola Christas and so forth, but there's one that doesn't have a sola and that's Semper reformed. If you know the word semper, it's probably from the marines Semper fi, always faithful. That's their idea. Semper reformed means always reforming. And one of the things that we need to do as a church is to make sure, even as I said, what there's a Catholic way and there's a Protestant way of understanding, justification.

We have to make sure we're always searching Scripture to see that we're hearing the whole of God's Word in our tradition. And the simple truth is that in our tradition, there is, at least in some places, a fear of the holiness or charismatic tradition. And for that reason, many churches like ours, reformed churches, are free aid of prayer for healing.

This church is a beautiful exception, and I'll say that in the PCA when I first started, very few churches had prayers for healing and now most do. So I'm thankful for that. We're making progress, but we're looking at a thing described in Romans sorry. In James chapter five, verses 13 to 18 about prayer for healing. Would you stand for the reading of God's Word?

From the NIV God's Word. Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any anyone of you sick? You 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, 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.

And again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produces crops. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth, and someone should bring him back, remember this whoever returns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

You may be seated, and I'll pray one more time.

Heavenly father, I pray that you would give us the gift of living out our identity as a Bible believing Bible, studying church, and enable us now to hear Your word and to love it, and to practice it more and more as time goes by. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.

So, I first started to study the book of James, 35 years ago, and as I was reading the book of James, I came to the end of the book. I was teaching a class. I was then a college professor, and I was teaching a class, and I had a friend who had a viral infection of the heart. A viral infection of the heart can be a very serious matter and can essentially look like a heart attack. My friend was weak and listless and his skin was manifestly gray. He had very little energy. He was very sick, spent days in the hospital, and when he got out he was not recovering fast. And I said to him, you know, I've been reading the book of James, and it says at the end of the book that if anyone is sick, they should call the elders of the church and pray over him. And there's a realistic expectation that you'll be healed. And he said, that's interesting. And then two weeks later, he said to me, remember that conversation we had after church a while ago? I said, no, remind me, I don't know which conversation you're talking about. He said, well, you know, the one about healing. He said, let's do that, because I'm still very sick. And I said, great, let's call the elders. And so we called the elders, and the pastor was a small church, one pastor and 6 or 7 elders. And we did what Presbyterians do. We formed a study committee, and we studied it for 6 or 7 weeks and hope that my friend did not. Richard did not die while we were studying whether we should pray over him or not. And at the end of the period, the pastor, who's a good and godly man, said, I think, yeah, this is something we've never done in the history of our church. but I do believe it's biblical and we should do it. I mean, gathered on appointed day, it was a Tuesday night. We all prayed for him. And since it was my idea, I was, not officially I wasn't a ruling elder, but I was a teaching elder helping out in the church. I was the one who kind of explained it, and I was the one who was to pray last. And the pastor, again, a good man and a godly man said, listen, folks, let's not expect too much here. Let's understand that that healing is not an everyday occurrence. And there's many ways for God to heal and so forth. And I thought, this is not what I need to hear right now. I'm, I'm doing this out of obedience. My expectations, humanly speaking, are not that high. I'm as flawed as anybody around in terms of prayers for healing. but we're going to pray. And he kind of said, don't expect too much. Restrain your enthusiasm. And my friend knelt down and we put our hands on him. And I experienced

something that you hear about in other parts of Christendom. As we begin to pray over him, I began to feel what I can only describe as flaming bolts of fire coursing through my body and just blazing through my head and through my neck and into my hands. And my friend Richard probably weighed 230, 240 pounds. And I felt that if I wanted to, I could throw him up to the ceiling and push him through the floor. And, you know, you went back through the walls. I felt an unfathomable, astonishing sense of God's power at that moment. And as the people were praying, it took every bit of my self-control to not say what I wanted to say. We got to stop asking the Lord to heal Richard. God is healing him now. He is healing him. He is healed. We need to stop praying and start praising God. But I had no expectation of anything like that happening. I heard that from strange, charismatic Pentecostal people, and I'd been taught to kind of snicker at that or be dubious of that. And so we prayed and I waited for my turn. I was last, and as I prayed, I'll just say my prayer was on the enthusiastic side about God's power and God's grace. But I didn't tell anybody. I was so shocked. I didn't tell anybody what I'd felt and what I was almost sure that I knew. And then the next week, I was a little bit early to church, and my friend Richard was a little bit early to church, and he came up to me with this wild look on his face. He goes, Dan, watch this. And there was a very steep set of stairs, about 20 stairs. And he went tearing up the flight of stairs. And I tore up the flight of stairs afterward, and he looked at me like a mad man and said, and I'm not even breathing hard. And I said, I knew it. He said, I knew it too. I said I was afraid to say anything. I thought everybody think I was crazy. He said, same with me. I didn't want to tell anybody because I thought everybody would think I was crazy, but I'm better. Medical records. They did the tests. He's better now. Richard was older. He was almost 50 then. He's with the Lord now. But he was healed radically that day. And as a result, our little church began to pray for people for healing. And we had another person who got healed, not as radical. I've never felt that fire, those bolts, blazing bolts of fire again. But I have had times when I was pretty sure God was going to heal somebody, and I've had times when I was way off.

Of course, as is normal for people on these cases. But other people did get better. There was another woman who was very, very sick. She was radically healed as well, and there were others that were healed slowly. There was one man who had cancer and he was in danger of losing his voice. He had cancer of the throat and he did lose his voice. They had to remove his vocal cords for the cancer. But his testimony was consistent. This God took you praying over me even though it didn't spare my voice. I am a far more dedicated Christian and I trace it back to that day. I don't know why, but God moved in me that day when we when we prayed, and for others who received no healing.

And so far as we could tell, no physical help, the no spiritual help, but a number of people receive God's healing. In a span of a couple of years in the life of our church. Now again, it was new. It's not new to your church, to our church. This church has been doing that faithfully year by year and the Bible tells us to do that.

Now, if you have your Bible with you and it could be a paper Bible, or it could be a Bible that's on some electronic format. I just want to make sure we know where James chapter five fits in James chapter four, which we'll talk about in two weeks. James 4 ends a long description of what real religion supposed to be like and how we fall short of that.

And it says, humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. And then it goes in the next little while, through a series of sins against humility, slander, chapter four, verses 11 and 12, and presumptuous planning to go here and there and get rich and then it turns views of wealth and power. Chapter five, verses 1 to 6.

And then it turns to active humility. If someone's exploiting you, pray to God and wait for the Lord to take care of you. That's chapter five, verses 7 to 12. And then in our passage, in this passage, we take every joy in every sort of God. We take it all to the Lord. We praise him for every blessing, and we seek him for every problem.

So it's in the context of a life of humility as opposed to a life of pride. And it tells us to take all of our requests to God and all of our interest to God. Notice it has four different statements in these verses. First of all, it says if anyone is suffering hardship, he should pray. Second, it says if anyone is in good spirits or rejoicing or ebullient, they should sing songs of praise.

If anyone is sick, specifically, they should call the elders. That's number three. And number four. If someone calls the elders, the elders are supposed to pray. So we walk through prayer. In all the situations of life, hardship, happiness and joy, great pain and illness. And then the leaders of the church praying over people. Let me say it a different way.

Individuals pray over their joys and sorrows. The elders pray over sickness, and then later on it says that friends pray over sins committed and prophets pray in times of need. So there's a lot of prayer. That's the main emphasis of this passage, prayer. And the first thing he says is that we pray when we face illness or trouble or loss or distress and or suffering, that suffering can be physical or spiritual.

When we're low, when we're anxious, when we're depressed, when we're in great physical pain, whatever the situation may be, we can take every pain to the Lord. We can also take every pleasure to the Lord. Now, one thing that I always love is to hear new songs. As our music team knows, I love the new songs, but there's always room for more new songs and there's room for songs about celebration.

Even more songs that take up our joys. What joys? You've got a promotion. You've got a great annual review. Your child scored the winning goal in the soccer game. Your child won the spelling bee. Your child is happy again. You solved the marital problem that you have. You can take all those joys to the Lord and sing of them.

Sing songs of praise. James says. Sing new songs. Beautiful songs sanctifies. Celebrate the joys of life. But the main focus is not celebrating joys. The main focus is prayer when you are sick.

And so James asks the question, is anyone among you sick? And if so, then call the elders and pray over him. Verse 14 says, and anoint him.

Now the word for sick literally means weak, and it means weak. Usually it means physically weak, but it can also mean people who are weak for other reasons. And a little bit later the passage says against the translated sick. But it's different words. It's used in the words it's used there means worn out. So, it says if you're sick, take it to the elders.

And it goes on to say if you're worn out. In other words, if you have a major illness, take it to God, not if you have a cold. And I know nobody's going to call the elders for cold. But it's one thing to be sick. It's another thing to be worn out by sickness. And I don't know if you have personally experienced loss, long term physical pain, or if you have a friend or relative has experienced long term physical pain and it wears people out.

The physical illness is one thing, but that just dealing with it, facing a day after day, your disability, your physical pain wears people out. And so you can take that to the elders and say, it's not just that I'm sick, I'm exhausted. I don't know what to do. I need more strength. I need family strength. I need God's strength and call the elders, because elders are the shepherds of the church, as they're calling to care for the flock of God.

And I will tell you that elders, by and large, elders have different gifts like everybody else. But when the call goes out for elders to pray that that call is answered, people want to pray over the people of God. That's the calling of an elder, which is a shepherd, because they care for God's flock, which is under your care.

As the Apostle Peter says, well, when it says, call the elders, please notice it does not say call elders who are known for having the gift of healing, the danger. The thing that we're worried about today in our circles is that somebody is going to think that we're saying that there are gifts, like from the apostolic era and, and, and people have the gift of miracles and certain portions of Christendom will celebrate that and maybe over celebrate it.

This passage is simply saying, if you're sick, call the elders. It doesn't mean you call elders who have a track record of praying over people in The Gift, but it's just called the elders, and they will pray over you. They'll pray for your healing and anoint them with oil. Why would you anoint with oil? Well, oil, of course, as you know in the Bible, is occasionally a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

Anointing with oil reminds us of the anointing of the Holy Spirit in a couple of places, like in maybe, Mark chapter six verse 13, and people sometimes put oil on wounds and bandaged people and put oil on it. And so we would say it's kind of like an analgesic, maybe a little bit like taking some, some Tylenol and some ibuprofen or something, and at the same time calling on God, anoint with oil.

In other words, it's not simply medicinal, it's a sign, when I've been able to lead and usually I'm not, I haven't been able to lead a time of prayer for healing here because it happens right after the first service, and I'm greeting people. But when I've in many occasions lead, we typically

take oil and we put it on a person's hands and on their forehead, forehead to signify your heart, your soul, your thought, your emotions, your worn out ness, your hands to signify your strength.

And so you anoint that person with oil. It's a symbol. Your hands and your head are a symbol of the whole person. Because when you're really sick, it shapes the whole person. And Jesus also did something like that. You know, when Jesus would heal people, sometimes he would touch them right? Nod your head at me if you know this is true.

And occasionally he would do things like stick his fingers in their ears with someone who's deaf because they couldn't hear his words. And so it's a symbolic way. And when someone was mute and couldn't speak on one occasion, he spat out on the person's tongue to signify that I'm going to do something with your tongue, because that person was not only unable to speak, but couldn't hear, and the two often go together.

So Jesus is saying, get ready, I'm going to do something with you to a person who can't easily understand. And when we anoint somebody with oil, we're saying, prepare yourself. God may do something. The Holy Spirit may choose to heal you at this time. This doesn't this this place. Physicians. The Bible has nothing against physicians in physical care.

In fact, in one place, you know, Paul says to Timothy, take a little wine for your stomach. He get a weak stomach, apparently. And that was that was his recommendation. And physicians, Christian physicians have a saying they've used for many years. The saying is, I dressed the wound. God healed it. That is to say, I may indeed put an antibiotic, and I may put some bandage on a wound to protect it from dirt.

And allow it to come together, put stitches. But unless God has put healing powers in the human body, which he blessedly has, no one's ever gonna get better from anything. So I dressed the wound. God heal that we're always willing to trust physicians, and we call on the Lord simultaneously. Now, what does say? You should call on the elders and the elders.

Pray over him. The person, as I mentioned earlier, is sick. The word can be translated weak, weakened by it, and they're worn out. The word is calm. Now, if anybody here knows Greek, it means you're to the point of exhaustion. I do believe this means in part, that people who are exhausted in other ways can call upon the Lord.

Occasionally you might have someone who is exhausted by caring for a variety of sick people themselves. Maybe they have several children who are sick, or a relative is chronically sick, or some ongoing great distress at work, and they say, listen, I'm not physically sick. I'm just worn out. I'm exhausted. You can call on the elders then to pray for me, invite them to come and pray and lay hands on me.

Petition for healing. When we pray, we're seeking something very specific. We're seeking. Verse 16 says to us, we're seeking healing. Please notice what it says in verse 16. It says, confess your

sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed. That's the goal, that we should be healed. Now I'm being a little bit technical.

Again, the word for healed is *sozo* can mean and often does mean saved. Now, one reason why I mention that is because there are lots of words that have a range of meaning, and I just want to talk about the word *save* in ordinary parlance. In English, we'll say things like, I know nobody here cares about football, but in football people sometimes say things like that saved here.

That linebacker made a game saving tackle. They saved the game right? That means they preserved something that was valuable. And we'll say things like, I would like to save those leftovers. No one is thinking the leftovers are fake or facing God's judgment. What we mean is the leftovers are worth something. We're going to save those. Or we can have maybe a lifeguard that saved someone who's floundering in the water.

We use the word. We even say things like, I save string, I save bags, I save, paperclips when they're on a piece of paper. Don't throw it out. I saved the paper clip. Right. So the English word *save* can mean eternal salvation, and it can mean not just preserve something. And the Greek word is *sōō* is exactly the same.

It can mean ordinary deliverance, ordinary help. Just helping somebody out or can mean eternal salvation. Now, in this place, the word. So I'm telling you, the word *healed* is the word same as the word *saved* means God is preserving this person. God is making them healthy again, making them whole again. That's the goal that they would be saved by God.

But I'm saying this for another reason, which we'll see in a moment. And that is that contrary to our expectations, James is connecting sin and sickness. Now I say contrary to expectations, because in America today we may pray for healing. But if somebody says, well, you know that person is sick because of sin, unless you're talking about the sin of addiction or heavy drinking, she gets cirrhosis of the liver or heavy smoking and they get lung cancer.

If you say there might be sin involved here, most people are going to say, you're judgmental, you're strange. What are you talking about? I'm just going to tell you that Richard, my friend of over whom we prayed.

After he was healed, said, friends, I have been guilty of a terrible sin for the last several months, and I believe that what James is describing is exactly what was happening in my life. He sent me in affliction because I was committing a terrible sin while claiming to be a Christian in good standing and a leader of the church.

And he confessed his sin not to everybody, but to a few people who had prayed over him and cared for him. Now we say, of course, that when someone is sick that they have gotten a germ or they have a genetic illness, and that is that is true, we can we can say both things at once. We can say there are germs and there's genetic illnesses.

And we can also say we should examine ourselves for sin. What do I mean by that? I mean that sometimes in the Bible it is clear that someone who is sick has in fact committed a sin. Jesus says to people after he heals them, go and sin no more, doesn't he? Now on other occasions they say to Jesus, hey, why is this person John chapter nine born blind?

Jesus what did he sin or his parents? And he was born this way. Jesus said neither one. This was done for the glory of God. So. So we need to say is some people, especially in the 21st century, need to re spiritualize illness to say there could be a spiritual component here. And then in the past they over Spiritualized.

But now we're in the business of reacting against over Spiritualized. We said, oh, we shouldn't assume that anybody committed a sin and that's why they're sick. And James says, well, don't assume they haven't committed a sin either. I'll say it a different way. If you're really sick and you're lying in bed for a number of days, it's a good occasion to examine your life and see if you strayed from God.

That doesn't mean you have strayed from God, but it's a good thing, he says, confess your sins, wanted to pray for one another. And the implication, of course, is if you have sin, not that I know that you have committed some sin. It also looks to us for a moment like maybe we have an absolute promise here. Can we go back to verse 15, a person who's in charge of the screen, can we go back to there we go.

Thank you very much. In verse 15 it says, and the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick. Save is that same idea. The word is save. Meaning save or heal will save the one who's sick, and the Lord will raise him up and we can say we're sure God is going to heal. It looks like an absolute promise, but I want you to notice that the word again, the word save, can mean deliver from a physical illness or can mean save forever.

And when you see raised, the Lord will raise him up. You think, oh, that could be one of two ideas. It could be the Lord will raise him or her up from their sickbed. Or it could be. Sounds like the language of resurrection, doesn't it? Because we know that every body is raised up on the last day. And so we pray with expectation.

We pray knowing that God can heal us, but we don't want to lay on somebody or anybody. The burden of the idea that's presented in some of our circles, some Christian circles, that if you pray and you don't get better, it's because you didn't have enough faith. And if you say to somebody you didn't get better because you don't have enough faith, you just said, not unless you're sick, you're staying sick.

But it's also a defect of spirituality on your part. So you're laying an extra burden on them. Now, I want to answer that concern, that error people have. The first point is, until work comes, everyone faces death. Our days are numbered, so everyone has a final illness and we have that final illness. When God decrees that our days are over.

And so we can't say that everyone will get rid of every illness if we just have enough faith. Second, we also know that Paul had a thorn in the flesh, which is physical by all indications, and he wasn't healed. And Timothy had an upset stomach. And so he was not miraculously healed. And Philippians two speaks of a man named Epaphroditus who was not miraculously healed, almost died, and recovered.

There is no universal promise of healing in this life. The Lord will raise us up from our sickbed, and if not, he will raise us up on the last day of that, we can be sure the prayer of faith saves, but we also say, thy will be done because we don't know. And God does have sovereign purposes in our illnesses.

And many of you know exactly what I mean when I say that some of us have learned things and illnesses that made us say, Lord, thank you for not taking that away immediately. You taught me things through that illness that I never would have otherwise learned. Thank you. And so we allow God to be sovereign, to do his will in our lives.

We know that the Lord Jesus had compassion on the sick, but we also know that he did not heal every last sick person in Israel. He healed people to stimulate faith, to cause, people to rise up and thank him to hear what he had to say. But he didn't heal everybody. So if he has sinned, you'll be forgiven.

We don't over spiritualize. We also need to re spiritualize. We don't say, I know you've committed a sin. That was the error of job's friends job. What have you done to suffer like this job said I haven't done anything. They said yes you have. God said at the end, stop rebuking job. He is my man. Not to put too fine a point upon it.

On the other hand, David said that when he committed a sin that lasted months and months, God sent him physical illness as a consequence. This is what he said in Psalm 32, which we cited briefly this morning. Also he said, when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long for day and night. Your hand was heavy upon me.

My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledge my sin to you. It did not cover it up. And I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the guilt of my sin. And that's why it says in verse 16, if you've committed a sin, confess your sin. Allow the Lord to at least show your sin and confess it.

Now again, I don't know about you, but when I first became a Christian, this is another teaching that was much debated and misused, and people were going around confessing their sins in ways that didn't seem quite right, saying too much about private matters. So let me say this about confession of sin. First of all, when you confess a sin, confess it to the person you offended.

You don't have to tell everybody what you did to your neighbor. You don't have to tell everybody you're mad at your neighbor and you decided to slash their tires. You tell your neighbor, you slash your tires, you buy some new tires. That's how you do it. We confess secret

sins that God, it does not do any good, except maybe in very rare cases, to say something like, let me confess that I'm envious of you.

Let me confess that I hate you for no reason. Let me confess that I've lusted after you. That doesn't go anywhere healthy. You don't have to confess secret sins. We confess private sins privately and public sins publicly. If someone propounded heresy in their teaching in front of the church, they should publicly say, I said something heretical. Someone steals money from the church or from their organization.

They should say to all the appropriate parties, I stole money, but you don't go around telling everybody everything you did. Now, in all of this, the prayers of a righteous person are powerful in their work. Now this is saying something about elders. There's a tendency for the church sometimes to think that a good elder, someone who's a successful person in this world, knows how to make things happen.

But according to the Bible, an elder we're calling the elders, right? We're calling the elders a prayer for the sick. The main trait of an elder is that he is a righteous person, righteous man and righteous people know how to pray God's way, God's will, and persist in it.

And that's why we call the elders. I'm not saying women can't pray. I'm not saying non elders can't pray with power. But elders should be men of prayer. And then he talks about Elijah. Now how do you notice that he doesn't call Elijah the prophet? He doesn't say, now listen, if you're a prophet, it's really going to work.

He bends back and says, please remember that anybody can pray. And he says, Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. That's a hint at the fact that although Elijah did great things, he prayed fervently, it wouldn't rain. I'm not going to tell you the story about that in the history of Israel, but during a time of great iniquity, God sent Elijah to pray, to stop the rain, to bring the nation to repentance in the terrible rain, the evil reign of Ahab and Jezebel.

And the rain stopped. But he also says, Elijah is a man like us, so you need to be a righteous person. On the other hand, Elijah also had his failings, didn't he remember after the great contest with the bail prophets? Nod your head if you know, he said. I just, you know, it's hopeless. Just kill me, Lord became despairing for no particular reason.

We understand. He was a man who has up and downs like us. What he did pray. For when he prayed, the heaven gave the rain. That the prayers were answered. A man with passions like ours, a man with weakness like ours. So I'm going to tell, I'm going to end with another personal story about reluctance to seek prayer. we're reluctant to seek prayer for healing because we think it's unscientific or naive. Reluctant because pride stops us. We don't want to admit how low we are. We don't pray because we're afraid of disappointment. What if I called the elders and nothing happens? I couldn't bear it.

We don't pray because of functional deism. God exists, but he doesn't really care about me. So in the year that I was praying for my friend Richard and then a number of other people in our

little church, we had a child and that child, inherited the allergies that I, bestow upon my children, which I got from my parents in turn. And they got from their parents. And all of our children have a little bit of allergies, but one had much more in her early days, her first 11 months to be exact. For her first 11 months, she had extraordinary eczema covering her from her neck to her ankles. Her whole body was just a giant red, raging, angry rash to change her diaper was to hear screaming. The entire time to give her a bath was to hear screaming the entire time, as her little skin as her little fingers just tore the skin, and we cut her fingernails back so she wouldn't lacerate her skin. Because, you know, babies have sharp fingernails and they're just little cuts all over her body from just tearing at the itching. And she would scream and cry just endlessly, it seemed. And we saw doctors and we prayed. And while we're praying for other people for massive illnesses, we should have called the elders to pray over her. And I don't know why. We just didn't we? It's only a rash and I can pray for other people. So and just and we didn't. And then finally, finally, I said, this is this is so idiotic. This is so faithless. And I didn't just call the elders from the church. We went to, but I was teaching in a Christian college we called their elders to, and everybody came over in a giant, a make up for not praying beforehand. And for reasons I don't understand, I was just very, very low. And I had I'd been praying over her every day, and my wife had been prayed over every day for her whole life. It seemed. And why should God heal her now? We've been praying and praying over her, and we prayed as an act of obedience and went about our business. And a couple hours later, I was reading in our living room and I heard crying upstairs. Seemed like crying, soft, crying. Somebody weeping gently upstairs. And I walked over to the to the bottom of the stairs. I said, is somebody crying? just softly and no answer. And I started to walk up the stairs and as I got up to the top, there was the bathroom and I saw my wife. Debbie's eyes were brimming with tears, and she said to me, she's playing in her bathtub for the first time in her life. She's playing in the bathtub. And as she undressed our child for the bath, what was 98% coverage of a ferocious raging rash was reduced to one spot about as big as two thumbs on the middle of her back. Was it gone forever that day?

And I just want to encourage you to pray and believe that God still heals today. Nobody has to have the gift of healing. Nobody has to be super spiritual. But God is good to us. People. God wants us to pray and to take everything to him. Every illness, every sorrow, everything that wears his out. Everything takes us slow and offer it to God's people.

I offer it to you, God's people, and to your friends that we pray over you and take our cares, our sorrows and our joys to the Lord.

Let's pray

Father, I thank you for this church. I thank you for the way, every year in the life of this church, there's been a steadfast resolve to follow your word, and hundreds and hundreds of people have received the prayer of the elders in this place. And yet, Lord, I know that there are many more people who are who don't come and don't have hope that you will heal or feel embarrassed or ashamed or afraid to bother people. And Lord, this is your goodwill. I pray that

we'd be filled with too many requests and we have missed just that. To figure out how to get enough elders, enough times, enough places to pray for healing as you teach us. And may we praise you as we see people lifted up by your grace and by your will, whether their bodies healed or their spirit is healed, or both. We ask that we be faithful and that you would work in our lives, and we say it in Jesus name,

Amen.