

The Complete Christian Values Prayer

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[0 : 0 0] Please, to James chapter 5, James chapter 5. Thank you very much for all who have contributed this morning. Really enjoyed the prayers, the singing. I enjoyed that video by Eric Liddell. I found it very moving, just Lucille and I went to the Holyrood, the palace, not the palace, the government place, and it's a good exhibition. It's not as big as I thought it was going to be, but it was very good, I must confess. And to see the medal, but I liked what he said. He said he thought he would run the first 200 as fast as he could and trust the Lord that he'd run. I thought that was very powerful, just his whole faith in God. And even what was so impressive was after that, everything he did after that was so impressive as a missionary and how he sought to bring the best out in others.

He was really driven by that. We were talking about that on Wednesday night, about looking out for the interests of others. Eric Liddell lived his whole life like that, so it was no surprise that he would applaud others, even if they did better than he did. It was quite moving. I hope the BBC show that again or something like that. I think the 100 meters is tonight. I don't know when the 400 is, but they showed it this morning, a wee kind of clip, not that clip, but the BBC showed a similar clip that he never ran, he ran in that, but never gave the reason why. In other words, they never gave glory to God, he just chose to do a different race. Never explained why. So maybe they'll mention this when they're sitting discussing this, that there was 100 years ago in Paris, this man did that. I hope that's the case and God gets the glory in that. That would just be terrific. Let's read and then we'll pray and then we'll look at this passage together. We're coming to probably one of the most controversial parts of the book of James, right at the end. Call the elders if you're unwell and what that means. And I prepared us for a whole week with COVID thinking, call the elders, call the elders. And I'll mention why I never did that. And maybe that will come across in this passage here this morning. So let's, we're coming to the end of James. We won't finish it this morning. We'll finish it next week. I'll leave the last two verses till next week. But let's read from James chapter 5. Let's read from verse 13. James speaking to these scattered Christians. Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well, and the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for one another or each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. 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. We'll end our reading at the end of verse 18. Let's come before God. Let's ask for the Lord's help. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you that you've not only saved us, but not left us in the dark. You've given us a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. You've given us your Word. And that, Lord, we thank you that we can learn not only about yourself and about your Son and about our sin and Jesus as our Savior. We can learn how we should think and how we should act and how we should behave, what we should believe. So, Father, we pray as we come to teaching from your Word this morning. We pray, Lord, that we might understand what this passage has to say to us. May the Holy Spirit, who led James to write these words, to record these words for us. Lord, may we understand. So, Father, just lead us and guide us as we pray. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. A couple of weeks ago, I came across a great expression that just made me laugh because I could appreciate what the expression was about. And about two weeks ago, I was reading an article. It was to do with another sporting event, the Tour de France. I love that. It's very good.

[4 : 22] For those of you who are uninitiated, the guy with the yellow top, he won it. And the other guy came second. The other guy, Vinigard, was just glad to be there. He'd been injured. And for him, winning was just getting there. He actually came second. He did very well. Whereas Pogaccia, he actually won the race. But the article said this, and it just made me smile because Vinigard, the guy in blue, basically wasn't so downcast. In fact, he didn't win. Says this, appearing on French TV less than 10 minutes later. That was after the ceremony. Vinigard was wearing the relaxed smile of someone who had just realized he hadn't run out of tea bags after all. And just the way he described that, I don't drink tea. But I can imagine just the relief, a cold, wet day, Saturday morning, you're looking for a brew, and you go in, and there is tea bags still there. You don't have to get your coat on and go out and find something. I don't drink tea. But there are two things I don't like to run out of. I'm almost obsessed by them. One is batteries, and one is light bulbs. I need to make sure I have these at any time. I don't like swapping batteries for anything else to work. When you go in the drawer and the AAA batteries that are there, or the bulb that's in a, it's not working. You just like to go, there is the bulb. Boom. Within seconds, it's been replaced. I must suffer from something going on there. But just the fact that you lack in some way, and immediately that need is met.

James' letter, he's just been talking about the second coming, encouraging these believers that the Lord will certainly come. Look to these things are coming, and the Lord will surely come. He wants to leave them something, something to, and basically that's what he's leaving them, tea bags, batteries, or light bulbs, the equivalent of that, that they don't feel they lack. In this case, it is prayer, but not just the importance of prayer. He doesn't end this letter by saying, remember, you need to keep praying, as we often do. He reminds them of the power of prayer. So, he's, in effect, leaving them batteries.

He's talking about that specific aspect of prayer. There is power in prayer, and that is what he wants to leave them. That's what this passage is all about. It's not very difficult in that sense to understand.

Next week, he'll encourage them to encourage each other, support each other. If one wonders to bring them back, and we'll look at that next week, that's how he finishes the letter. But he's writing, as you remember, to Christians who are struggling. They've just newly been saved. They're not Christians for very long. They've been scattered because of the persecution, and as the head of the church in Jerusalem, Jesus, half-brother, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he wants them to be able to stand firm, to grow in their faith, to become mature. And ever practical, James has looked at so many topics in the book of James. In his letter, he's written about trials and temptation, and how the mature Christian will understand what that's like. The need for wisdom, how to look at riches, how to look at poverty, how to not just listen to the Word, but to obey the Word. A mature Christian will recognize this. Danger of showing favoritism, of doing good deeds, of controlling our tongue and watch what we say, of not presuming about tomorrow, and so forth. He's dealt with these everyday aspects that could easily draw us off course. And last time, you remember in the verses before the passage we read about the last days. Judgment is coming upon those who have rejected the gospel, but those of us who know and who love the Lord, we look forward to that day. But before he signs off, he wants to encourage them.

He wants to encourage them about prayer. And that's what this passage is all about. Every verse that we read in that short passage mentions prayer. It is so important. He's consumed by encouraging them by prayer, and not just its necessity, but its power. And that's what this passage is all about. It's as simple, it's as clear as that. As we wait for the Lord, there is prayer, there is power in prayer.

[8 : 56] Now, before we look at this in detail, something to say just very briefly about that. Prayer is powerful only because God is powerful. That is the only reason. Prayer is not some magic charm. You sometimes listen to Christians that say, prayer works. It's as if it's just a saying of praying that opens doors.

Prayer is powerful because God is powerful. And prayer works only because God works. Prayer moves the hand of God. Without God, prayer is dead and useless. So, James wants to really impress this upon them, the power of prayer. And he wants to look at prayer from every angle, the power of prayer. And that's what I'm going to do. One of my elders a number of years preached on this passage, and I've always remembered his points. And I want to stick with his points. I'll flesh them out differently from the way he did. But I liked his points, and I found them very helpful. So, I'm going to mention them just now. So, let's look at the power of prayer, or the importance of prayer.

And the mature Christian values prayer. If you're a Christian here this morning, you know the power of prayer. You've experienced it. You may be here this morning and doubting the power of prayer, doubting a God who's powerful, who can do more than we ask or even imagine. So, let's look at four things then in this passage. First of all, James wants them to look up. First of all, he tells them to look up, to look up to God. Verse 13, is anyone in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. James, ever practical. In these two statements, he's encompassing the whole of life. You're here this morning. You're either in some sort of trouble, or you're maybe joyful. You're content. You're happy. You feel blessed, because there's nothing, no wind blowing contrary to your way of life. And basically, James is covering all of life, from gladness to sadness, from happiness to trouble. And he's basically saying it's very easy to understand. If you're in trouble, he says, pray. Pray about this, if you're in trouble. If you're not in trouble and you're happy, it doesn't mean that you might be trouble-free, but you're not anxious, you're not troubled in that way, then you are to sing songs of praise. I like that. He didn't just say praise. Sing songs of praise.

This comes far more naturally to Lucille than I. She's always on, what do you call it, Spotify, is it you call it? And music's playing out of Alexa and stuff like that. There's quite often Christian songs. I'm usually playing jazz or something. So when she's in a good mood, she'll play these Christian songs, and it's great. And some folk, that's your character. You just sing songs when you're cheery. And in these two things, James is basically looking at the whole of life. You're either in one or in the other. But wherever you are, every day, you should be talking to God. It's as simple as that.

It's as plain as that. And I like that because it takes your religion from being a ritual to something that's very real. It's very real. Lucille will often ask me, coming in a morning or of an evening, usually on a Sunday morning, how are you feeling about this morning's sermon? Now, I never answer that in the way that I think, well, I've got the points, the points are all there, blah, blah, blah.

[12:34] I always answer it in the way that, do I feel close to God? Do I feel near to God? That I have the mind of God in what I'm about to say. And that is, for me, that is better. That is, you want to handle the scriptures right, but you want your relationship to be real. So, at any time, if somebody comes up to you, how are you feeling today? It's not necessarily based on your feeling. It's the joy or the peace will come based on the reality of your relationship to God. And if you are the type of person that can pray and just prays and just talks to God, being a Christian is simply talking to God. If your religious life is such that, well, that's half past seven, I have my quiet time, I finish at quarter to eight because I do something, I catch the bus or whatever, and it's a stop and start type of relationship you have with God, you will struggle. You will really struggle in life. So, James is basically saying, as he ends this letter, he's dealt with loads of things, and he says, as you wait for the Lord's coming, walk a bit like Eric Liddell, oh, your head held high, walk a bit like that the whole time. You're either talking to the Lord or you're praising the Lord. You're either pouring at your heart before him, but it's not something you just do in the morning or you do at night or you just do. Both of those things, trouble and happiness, have the potential to draw us away from the Lord.

Trouble, we get worried, we get anxious, we complain, we can even get angry and depressed. Trouble can lead us in so many different directions, and often it's the third or the fourth thing that we do, we pray. James says, are you in trouble? Pray. Simple as that. Just should be the first thing you do. When things are going well, you tend not to look to God. I'm okay, I don't really need to pray that much because everything's going well. Have a good day. I'm really looking forward to the meal tonight or whatever it is, seeing family. Everything's going well. That too can affect the reality of your relationship with God. It turns it into a stop-start. He's there like a GP that you just come to when you're in trouble. Whereas James, right at the very start, you want to live your life, live it with your head looking up to the clouds. Look up in every aspect of your life.

So if you're in trouble, pray first. If you're feeling blessed or happy, sing songs of praise. So I don't know where you are. You should either be praying this morning, living in this attitude of prayer, talking to God, Lord, I'm struggling. And then you're praying throughout the day, or you're singing praise to God. But neutrality is not an option in the Christian life. It shows that our relationship is not as healthy as it should be. So that's the first thing, look up. The next thing that he deals with here is look to. Instead of this vertical relationship, and that is a powerful relationship, believe you me, that vertical. If that relationship's right, and you are so one with God, talking to him, chatting to him, just loving him, that's great. But James now moves from this general aspects of life to one specific thing, and it's the area of illness when we become ill. It befalls every one of us at every time. And now he's looking at the horizontal level. There'll come a time in your life when you're poorly, when you're ill.

There's another way in which the power of prayer can be seen, is when you look to the elders. And this is what we're looking at here. We're all prone to sickness. It's one of these verses, verses 14 and 15. Let me remind you of them. Is anyone among you ill? He's mentioned as a specific trouble. Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And 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.

Now, this small passage in the book of James has caused so much trouble amongst Christians trying to understand what this passage is about. I'm going to try the best I can and explain what's happening here.

For me, it's not rocket science. It really isn't. But try and explain what is happening here. This will be the longest. I'll have another two points after this. Don't think, boy, we're going to be here all day. This will be a wee bit longer. The other two, very quick, boom, boom, and we're finished. So that's where we're going to go. Now, what is this all about? I remember, as I say, one of my elders preaching on this a good number of years ago, and I always remember what he says.

[17:29] When you come to try and interpret Scripture, he says, the plain thing is the main thing, and the main thing is the plain thing. And when you look at this, this is very plain. This isn't difficult to understand. This is a very simple passage of Scripture. To try and make this mean something other than it says, you need to go through some linguistical gymnastics or theological or exegetical thing to try and put, maybe it means this. It means what it says. It says, the plain thing is the main thing. So I want to try and keep the main thing as the plain thing in this passage. It's the only way we can really understand it. Now, what, before we look at what it means, what it does not mean? It does not mean that doctors are obsolete. It doesn't mean, forget the medical profession, whenever you're ill, phone the elders. Boy, I'm glad that is the case.

Can you imagine what that would be like? Boy, you'd, you'd, anyway, well, we'll go there. But that's, it's not a, the elders are not a substitute for medicine. I mean, we laugh at, but I have met people who, well-meaning Christians who basically says, stop taking your meds. Just, if you've got faith, you can be healed and this can happen. These folks should be strung up by the thumbs. It's shocking that they, they just disregard this. Here is a fact, all healings, every single healing is from God.

Whether it's through elders or doctors or medicines, whether it's through a healing plaster or the latest surgical techniques, James has already mentioned this in verse 17 of chapter 1, every good and perfect gift comes from above. God has orchestrated things where he's put skill into the heart of the medical profession. So doctors, nurses, and so forth are God's gifts. Whether it's a tablet or a syringe or a syringe or a test or a scan, all of these things come from God. Timothy, you remember, was asked because of his frequent ailments to add a little wine to his diet, and that would probably settle his stomach or whatever. God puts these things in place to, to help us. So this verse doesn't do away with medicine. Forget the medicine, just call the elders. That's not what this is saying. Also, it is not a sacrament, extreme unction, which is a Roman Catholic teaching where a priest comes with oil, usually when somebody's on their deathbed, and they're poorly, they can hardly pray for themselves, and the priest comes, he prays over them, and basically absolves them of their sins.

That, in other words, they're saved. Now that has more to do with superstition than Scripture. No one is saved from sin because of anything that somebody else can do to them. I can't, we can't, the elders don't just rock up. Somebody's not a Christian, they're a bit poorly. We pray over them, and that is them saved. Individuals need to apply this, the gospel, to their own life, and to repent, and to believe. So it's not extreme unction. No one is saved for what a priest or an elder can do.

[21:02] Individuals need to believe and to repent. Also, this isn't limited to the New Testament period or the apostolic period. The plain reading of this is the elders, elders in churches. We have elders today.

It is not just for the Apostle Paul and stuff like that that they did. It is, it continues on to today. So, if that's what it's not, what does it mean? Basically, there is indications here that when the person is ill, they're quite seriously ill. And there are indications that there's a fair degree of illness in this. First of all, the elders are called to go to them. It's not the other way around.

They are maybe poorly, so you have to go to them. Secondly, it's the elders who do all the praying. It is the elders' prayers that's under the microscope here. It is not the person themselves.

It's the prayer of faith of the elders that heals them. That is the plain reading of this. So it might be that the person's so weak and that they can hardly pray. We are told in verse 15 that the person is sick. They're not just ill, but it's the implication of this that they're weary, that they're worn out.

Fourthly, it's not the sick person's faith that is exercised here. The only faith that is mentioned here that's effective is the prayer of the elders. It is their prayer. And fifthly, we are told the elders are to pray over them. Now, that might just mean posture. It might just mean you lay hands on them or whatever. But it might be that the person is sick in bed. It might actually imply that as well.

[22 : 47] You have to pray over them that they're horizontal, as it were. And that's why the Puritan Thomas Manton says this, the elders must not be sent for upon every light occasion as soon as the head or foot acheth. But in such grievous diseases wherein there is danger and great pain. So the implications here is the person is seriously ill. And that's why I never called the elders, because I had COVID. And I was told to take paracetamol, drink loads of fluid, and so forth.

And it'll just run its course. I knew that it was a common illness. I didn't say, right, I'm coming, I'm due to preach, can you come? It's a common thing. It's common to man. There's already things in place. I've developed a wee kind of stye. I did the same with that. I didn't say, oh, no, I've got this wee stye in my eye. Where's the elders coming? I bathed myself, as my wife always nags me to bath it with salt water and don't rub it. Just one wee wiping in another. What is I working that? Eh, six wee claws to get rid of this stye. I didn't feel the need to do this, because medicine is already there. And I availed myself of this. James is also not thinking here of public healing services. That's where elders usually summon the sick. This person is sick. It's a private matter. The person's unwell. They are calling the elders. They're seriously ill, and they're calling the elders to them. They are called, and they engage in a twofold ministry. One is prayer, and one is anointing. The elders are doing these two things. And there are two promises attached to this. The prayer of faith will, and the Lord will raise them up. Secondly, if they have sinned in any way, they will be forgiven. So, let's look at these. Anointing them, the oil. If anyone is sick, let them call the elders to the church and pray over them and anoint them with oil. The oil is not medicinal.

There's nothing magic in the oil. James doesn't tell us that the elders are to bless the oil beforehand, do some kind of ceremony over the oil. The oil will be the healing thing, the thing that will actually do it. We're not told it's the oil that heals. It's the prayer of faith. So, the oil is basically symbolic. Whenever the word oil is used in the Scriptures, it speaks mostly in a symbolic nature for the anointing, the setting apart of a priest or a king, where God has chosen this person, and he's involved in it. And it's a spiritual act, and it's very symbolic about that. So, there's nothing special about the oil. It's not prayed over beforehand. The healing is in the name of Jesus through the prayer of faith. So, that's the first thing. It's just oil. It's ordinary oil, but it's symbolic. It's a spiritual act. You're involving the Lord in this. Secondly, we are told that they are made well or raised up. The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise them up. Now, some people say, maybe because the elders go around and after 20 visits, nobody's actually healed. So, they say, well, it must mean something else. It must mean a spiritual resurrection.

It must be pointing to a future resurrection in days gone by. But the plain reading of this does not suggest that, doesn't even hint that it's something spiritual to be done later on. The natural reading is that this person is physically healed as a result of this. The prayer of faith will make the sick person well. The Lord will raise them up. That's some set of batteries to be given, isn't it, in prayer? This happens, and you will be healed. Now, if the elders are honest, and maybe even if you're honest, you might look at this, and you wish it said something like, and sometimes it will heal the person.

[26 : 56] Maybe every now and again, somebody will get healed. It makes it a lot easier, saves us a lot of embarrassment if we go, and it doesn't happen. Well, that passage just says sometimes. It says never now and again. It doesn't say that. The passage is clear. The plain thing is the main thing. The person will be healed. So, what is happening here? Where does the answer lie? It lies in the prayer, the prayer offered in faith, the power of prayer. So, let's look at the prayer. The physical healing is attributed to the elder's prayer, offered in faith, and the Lord will raise them up. That's verse 15.

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well. Now, what is this prayer of faith? Faith in what? This is where people go astray. Perhaps many times this procedure has been followed, and there's been no healing. And usually the explanation that's given at this time was, well, we just didn't have enough faith. If only we had enough faith. We assume that faith is ours to work up. We

need to work up this faith. And as Kent Hughes says, the prayer of faith is not something we can manufacture by saying, I believe, I believe, I believe, I really believe, I truly believe, I doubly believe. It's not something you can just work up. Prayer is a, sorry, faith is a gift of God.

Ephesians 2.8. Bible makes it plain, even the faith we have is given to us by God. James noted earlier that some prayers do fail. He mentioned this in chapter 4, verse 3, when you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your own pleasures. In other words, selfish prayers, those type of prayers that isn't so invested in the will of God, but in their own will, they often fail because they are not part of God's will. And James tells us, but here is a type of faith that doesn't fail. Now, why doesn't it fail? It doesn't fail because the prayer of faith, here, is not faith in the power of God. It is faith in the will of God. That is the difference. If it was faith in the power of God, well, God can heal, so God will heal. It's simply true that God does not always want everyone to be healed. We follow a natural course. Sometimes there's medicine or whatever we take or we're getting old or whatever. But to just say it's faith in the power of God, that is where we go wrong. I've read in a verse that Jesus healed his folk, and I believe he can do it, and it doesn't happen. Where have I gone wrong? Simply because it is faith in the will of God. And that is what's happening here. When it's God's will to heal, the Lord grants a persuasion that he will grant the healing, and he enables the elders to pray that prayer of faith. It's faith in many ways in the known will of God. And it's such a special function of the elders. The prayer of faith here made by the elders is faith that it's God's will to heal. God has somehow convinced them as one beforehand that it's his will to work in this particular way. Because God doesn't always heal. He doesn't always want to heal. Paul's thorn, remember, whether it was an eye problem or whatever, we don't know exactly.

He was given this thorn in the flesh because of the revelations to torment him. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away. And the Lord says, my grace is sufficient for you. Sometimes the Lord says, no, but I will give you grace. That's a fact. Trophimus was not healed by Paul. 2 Timothy 4.20, Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus ill at Miletus. He never healed him. And yet, Paul could heal. You remember in Acts 19, God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that were touched were taken to those who were ill. Their illnesses were cured, and evil spirits left them. But here, Paul says, I left him ill. You'd think, well, you could have healed him, and you never did. Well, you must be a bad piece of work, Paul. You could have healed him. It was not God's will. He left him ill. So, this is not faith in the power of God. [31 : 38] It is faith in the will of God that God wants to and will heal. All prayer is not just about power.

Please hear this. All prayer is also about humility. Prayer is where we come and where we pray, but we say, nevertheless, your will be done. All prayer is a commitment to the will of God. And that's what this prayer is as well. It's not forcing God's hand to do something he might not want to do. It's not trying to work up faith in the power of God. It's faith in the will of God. And here is the greatest challenge to elders. I mean, this is scary for elders. It really is. Elders sometimes just see the role as, well, I rock up and we cut the grass and we do whatever, and we just decide this, that, and the other. This whole passage is about maturity for believers. Now, if elders are the mature people that they should be, we should be men who are spiritual, who walk close to God. I go back to what I said before. It's not just what you do. It's this relationship. Now, if you're called to a real relationship with God, praying, praising, 24-7, you're either doing one or other, much more the elders, where we live close to the heart of God. And it's in that scenario, and it's as real as that, where God can communicate to the person who's ill and to the elder that this is what they should do.

And when the elders come together, it's not giving it a go. It's we feel compelled that this is the case. We also know our weaknesses and the fact that our heart is deceitful, and we can get this wrong, and it often happens. The element of self-examination here in this prayer of faith is not on the person of the sick person. The examination for faith is on the elders here.

The weight lies upon them, and we need to be one. There's a common feeling that the Lord should do this. Pray for your elders in this, that your elders would be godly men who live close to God, who can discern the will of God. It has to be as real as that. We're not just playing at this. It's, Lord, show me. And as the elders are regularly praying for the sick in the church, Bill or whoever is unwell, one of our elders is poorly in John, but as others become, that we earnestly bring them before the throne of God. And it might well be the Lord is saying, you know, this is somebody we should be praying for. The Lord lays it on their heart. They call us. We feel a oneness in this because we have

this real relationship with the Lord. And that is why only this doesn't happen very often in churches, to know that closeness, that oneness. It's not commonplace, but it's a scary, scary responsibility for elders to discern God's will and to act on it and to come in faith. You're there because we believe, we feel led. This is what God wants to do. And where that faith is present, the person will be healed. It's faith in the known will of God. God does heal, and that is one way that he does it, not just through medicine, but sometimes through the elders. It's not for a bygone era. It is for today. But we need to know the will of God. It's faith in the will, the known will of God. Secondly, there's spiritual restoration as well. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.

Few facts under sin and when we're ill. All sickness is a result of the fall. Every single illness that we experience is a result of the fall. But your own personal sickness may not necessarily be a result of personal sin. Some folk are crazy enough to say that, well, you must have sinned in some way.

[35 : 49] You've got COVID. It's not the case. But all sin is the result of the fall, but personal sin, your own personal sin at a specific time, may not necessarily be a result of the fall. The disciples of Jesus made that mistake. Remember, they saw a man blind from birth who sinned, this man or his parents. Neither this man or his parents. But this happened that the work of God should be displayed.

They were linking the blind man's illness with his sin, and Jesus says that was not the case. But sometimes they can be linked. Sickness and sin can be linked. Communion service in the early church, whoever eats and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood. That is why many among you are weak and ill, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

They treated the holy things of God in a slapdash manner, and as a result of that, they were sinning, and it affected them physically. Jesus warned a man, you remember, go and sin no more, lest something worse happen to you again. He was healed, his sins were forgiven, go and sin no more.

And you remember, in Hezekiah's day, and that is why it's good when we are laid aside for a time, the Lord will sometimes do that to speak to us, to cause us to examine him. I went through this for months, when I kept praying, Lord, Lord, why is this? All I was praying for was somebody competent, in the NHS. Everybody I met, physios, nurses, doctors, they were all worse than the one before.

You could, I should write a book about this, it was so bad. And I said, Lord, I'm not necessarily praying for healing. Can I just get somebody that actually knows what they're doing, that knows how to operate the buttons in the scanner, that can actually, and it just got worse. And then I thought, maybe the Lord is doing something in me. And you stop, and you examine your own life, and you say, Lord, Billy David, Lord, lead me in the way, show me if there's any wickedness in me, lead me in the way everlasting. And sometimes we just come and say, I'm not well, heal me. But sometimes it can be linked to our sin. Here's Hezekiah. Remember, I like Hezekiah. He's one of my heroes. It says in 2 Kings 20, in those days Hezekiah became ill, was at the point of death, Isaiah, son of Amos, went to him and said, this is what the Lord says, put your house in order, because you're going to die. You will not recover. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord, remember, Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.

[38 : 37] And Hezekiah wept bitterly. Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord said, go back and tell Hezekiah, the ruler of my people, this is what the Lord, the God of your father David said, I have heard your prayer, seen your tears, and I will heal you. On the third day from now, you will go up to the temple of the Lord, and I will add 15 years to your life. Hezekiah was restored physically, spiritually. He wept, he prayed, and God worked in his life. So, we need to realize that healing, all healing, physical or spiritual, involves the whole person. Please hear that.

All healing of God. Sometimes we want the Lord just to heal my sore back or my knee or whatever, when the Lord might say, John, I could heal this, but spiritually you are not well. You're not praying, you're not serving. You just think I'm a spiritual Santa Claus. Lord, can you do this? I'm just, some, your spiritual GP. Healing is always holistic in God's eyes. It's always both. He wants us to be spiritually strong and physically strong as well in that way. So, we need to examine ourselves fully when we're ill. So, what we said under this, very quickly, life, we can become ill. Praise the Lord. He's given us medical profession to help us. Sometimes it's right to call the elders. When they feel it's God's will, they are then under examination. Do they feel that this is what God wants them to do

as well? If they are united in this, they can come and call the sick person to heal them. This prayer of faith that God gives them, God will use to heal them. Faith in the will of God, not simply in His power.

Sad to say, we don't always get that right. But that is a clear understanding of this. That is the plain reading and the teaching of this. Thirdly, let's look very quickly at the last two. Look around. Not just look up, not just look to a specific group of people, the elders in the church, but look around to other brothers and sisters this time. Verse 16, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other that you may be healed. Here's another type of healing, spiritual healing, you could say. It's as if he's mentioned as spiritual healing, but he's also saying, you know, brothers and sisters have a part to play in this as well. Now, this is confess your sins to each other. Now, this doesn't mean complete transparency. I've known deacons, elders to stand up and say, can I just say the Lord's convicted me of something and they shared something. I remember thinking, I don't quite know if that's the place you should be sharing that. It was very brave of them and they were asking for help, but human nature being as it is, they would be diminished in their eyes. Well, you have a problem with that. It wasn't such a sin where they should give up the role of a deacon, but they would have been diminished in people's eyes. I remember thinking, you know, your sin was personal between you and the Lord. That's where really you should have kept it. So, I think what happens in this way, when you're confessing your sin, basically, it should always be as wide as the sin and no wider. [41 : 58] So, if your sin is just against you and God, secretly confess that to God. If your sin is against someone else, you need to go to that person. It's not enough just to confess it to God. If your sin is public, the confession needs to be made public as well. It must be in proportion to the nature of the sin.

But when we do this, it is very powerful. When there are times when we do feel that it's right to confess this to our brothers and sisters, maybe not in a gathering this size, but it might be a small group. Maybe you've got prayer partners or whatever, and you say, I'm struggling with this area. That really moves the heart of God. That is powerful prayer. When brothers and sisters, you're not just plowing your own furrow. I'm a bit like that. Keep my own counsel. Just keep plowing. But to share, with somebody, I'm struggling in this area. That is, as it's a powerful relationship through the elders, and also in your own relationship with God, talking to Him, so it is powerful when you're sharing with another brother or sister, or a few brothers and sisters. And pray for each other, so that you may be healed. The Lord hears such prayers, such actions. It involves humility on behalf of the person who's confessing and on the person or people who are listening. There's an intimacy there. Let's pray for you, brother. They keep the counsel together. They pray together daily. That is a powerful aspect of prayer. And James wants to say there's power in that type of prayer as well. And lastly, lastly, look back. Look back to the old saints. He looks at Elijah, verse 16. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. And then he remembers Elijah. He was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it wouldn't rain. And you know the story, and then he prayed again that it did. Here is powerful prayer through a righteous person. Now, we often read that and go, I wish that was me. I wish I was the righteous person that Elijah was, and I could pray. Well, that would be a good skill to have, isn't it? I was reading something out there about superpowers.

Did you want to be invisible or whatever? I'd just love to pray in Scotland that I could stop the rain and start it whenever I felt like it. That would be quite a gift to have. But here is a prayer of a righteous person. And we think, if only I was that person. The simple truth is this. A righteous person, the most righteous person, is the person who recognizes their unrighteousness. That is the most righteous person. If you meet somebody who's just saying, Lord, I'm glad I'm not like other people, they are not righteous. But usually the person who is the most humble, who feels their unrighteousness, they are often the person who is most righteous. And this is what you have in Elijah. James mentions Elijah because he's an ordinary guy. That is the whole point. This power is available to anybody.

[45 : 07] If Elijah could do that, that's what he wants to emphasize, then we can do it. Elijah from Tishbe. He's a nobody from nowhere. Nobody knows where Tishbe is. I cycle from, what do you call it? I'm discovering in Midlothian. I've lived here for 10 years previous. Places I've never even heard of in Midlothian. I was speaking to somebody who lived in Musselburgh for about 35 years and happened to say, oh, I cycle, I go from Musselburgh up to Edgehead. And he's looking at me. Have you heard of Edgehead?

No, where's Edgehead? You go up through Carberry. There's next to nothing between Musselburgh and there. It's the next wee village you come to. There's loads of wee places. It's a bit like when you go through France, you know, and you see, this is a village. And then you get the wee sign with a red line through it. That was a village. There was two houses. You go through it. There it is. There it goes. And Midlothians like that, there's tons of wee places. You could be Agnes from Edgehead or whatever. That's what James wants to emphasize here. He's chosen somebody whose prayer was powerful, but he got things wrong. He made mistakes. He's from Tishbeast. He's a nobody from nowhere.

And God used this man. He could pray the most amazing prayers. He gives us one example of this. This power of prayer is open to everyone. You might say, well, I'm not an elder. I can't do these big, powerful prayers and heal somebody. You are so-and-so from wherever. John from Springburn. You are so-and-so from somewhere. And the smallest wee village is even better. A wee obscure place. You might be in the center of Edinburgh or whatever. I don't know what your background is. But James is bringing his letter to a close. He's writing to them. He wants them to make sense of the Christian life. He wants them to grow because God has done a work in them. And he wants to finish, leave them batteries, tea bags, light bulbs, saying, this is what you're going to need. This will see you through to the Lord's coming. The power of prayer. Make sure you're up. If that relationship is real and relevant 24-7, you talk is powerful. At times, look to the elders. God may have revealed his will to them and to you that they pray above and beyond the medical profession in that case. But look around.

[47 : 38] Look for you. And work together as you press on towards eternity. But look back. Look at what he did. There is power in prayer because God is powerful. It's available to the weakest of saints. May we know that for ourself. Let's stand and we'll sing an old hymn. Be thou my vision. Amen. Just before we close in prayer, can I remind you, we begin a new series in the book of Ecclesiastes this evening, if you can make that. That's always such an encouragement to each other. But we also learn from God's Word, especially in Ecclesiastes, how we might share our faith with others. So we'll look at that this evening and the plight of the human condition without Christ. So let me close in prayer. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you, Father, that every good and perfect gift comes from above. And we thank you for the many temporal things that we take for granted. That while we are here, Lord, with all our aches and pains, we thank you for the medical profession. But we thank you, Father, for faith. We thank you for prayers of faith. As you reveal your will to us, we pray, Father, that we might know something of this. Pray especially for us as elders,

Lord, that we would not only remain close to you, but remain close to the flock placed under our care. So, Father, help us to know them. Help us to feel what they go through. Help us, Father, to pray. And above all, Lord, may we know your will, your mind as it relates to them as well. So, Father, we pray that you'll speak to us. And, Father, for each one of us, may we know something of the power of prayer that Elijah knew. May we be excited and thrilled, Lord, of the power of prayer through a powerful God as we leave this place. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you, folks.