

Chapter 7

Deliver the Goods – Part 1

Seven Healing Procedures from James 5:14-18

The Motive, The Means, The Men

Now we want to look more closely at James 5:14-18. This passage of Scripture is unique. There's no other Scripture like it. There's no other information in the Bible that gives us the steps or procedures by which we are to approach the Lord for healing. I want to walk through these seven steps.

I'm going to be using the New King James version for a reason. I have studied the New International Version, and it is a wonderful version for devotional times with the Lord. It is, however, a paraphrase and a translation. Sometimes it's not as reliable as a translation since it attempts to define words for us rather than giving a more literal word-for-word translation of the Greek. The New King James does because it stays closer to the original Greek and because it is most familiar to me.

James 5:13-18

"Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing songs. Is any of you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up. And if he has committed any sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another and pray one for another that you may be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit."

Many people often misunderstand and misapply this calling of the elders and anointing with oil. The Roman Catholic Church in the Dark Ages decided this was the extreme unction. It was only when somebody was dying and there was no hope. Therefore, you were to call for the elders when all hope was gone. For them, it was for forgiveness of sin so the person could go to heaven. That is not the purpose of this passage. This passage is about healing, not about death. It is about rescue. It is about saving the sick from their sickness.

The word "save" in verse 15 is the Greek word *sozo*, which means to save or to rescue from danger. It is also in Matthew 9:22 as *"to make whole."* When the woman with a hemorrhage touched Jesus' garment he said, *"Daughter, be comforted, your faith has made you whole (sozo)."* It's about redeeming you from the hand of the enemy. It is about the Lord being *Jehovah Rapha*, the Lord who heals us.

There are seven steps that we see in this passage.

The motive, the means, the men, the mode, the manner, the mandate, and the method.

I'm using an alliteration that I hope will facilitate our memory of these steps. It might give you a better handle on the process. If you write these notes in the margin of your Bible, it may help to keep it clear in your mind. All seven steps are important.

1. The Motive – “Is any sick among you?”

The passage itself seems to show that the person is in bed, because it says, "*The Lord will raise him up.*" He's using the word of raising somebody up out of bed, picking them up by the hand and raising them to an upright position. So, as we see the word “sick”, my understanding of this (yours may be different) is that you don't call the elders for every little thing that's wrong with you.

This is not your everyday sniffles. This is not for a cold, the flu, or a headache. The passage indicates "*the Lord will raise him up*" meaning he cannot get up on his own. He is too sick. It is not about feeling better. It's about getting up from a sickbed. Psalm 41:2 says, "*The Lord will strengthen him on his bed of illness; You will sustain him on his sickbed.*"

The assumption here is that you have already asked the Lord, not once, but in the continued persistent manner described in Luke 11. You have asked, sought, and knocked on the door of heaven for your healing. Earlier, James said in verse 13, "*Is any afflicted? Let him pray.*" The Greek word there is *kakopathe*, variously translated as to “endure hardness or suffer trouble.” It is the idea of being in trouble or under attack. He doesn't say call for the elders in that case, but you should pray and continue praying. There is some personal responsibility implied here.

I think we need to understand that in every situation of life, we don't need to run to the altar, or run to the elders. We have a Savior who hears and answers prayer.

We have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We have become His children through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He has forgiven us our sins. He's written our names in heaven, and Jesus said,

"It's your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." – Luke 12:32

In Luke 11 Jesus taught us to, *"Ask, Seek, and Knock,"* that is, to be persistent in prayer. This is not about just asking once. James 5:13 already covered that when you initially faced affliction. You cannot by-pass James 4:8, which instructs us to *"Draw near to God and he will draw near to you."*

This is the knocking and seeking to receive

- 1) We can boldly ask for a word from the Lord,
- 2) We can boldly ask for a promise from the Lord,
- 3) We can boldly ask for a comfort from the Lord,
- 4) We can boldly ask for a touch from the Lord.

We have every right *"to come boldly before the throne of grace"* to ask for the Lord's help for all our needs.

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." – Hebrews 4:16

We don't need the elders to do that for us. I am saying this to keep you from rushing to the altar every time you have a need. The elders are not the ones who supply your needs.

The calling of the elders and anointing with oil is often misunderstood and misapplied. It is not "last rites." It is also not the first thing to do when we are sick. It is not a magical formula—do this and you will be healed. The emphasis is on reaching out to others when urgent prayer assistance is required. Godly praying people get answers.

The scenario is a disease or infirmity that is not responding in the natural way. God isn't answering in the normal way. If I am suffering and in pain, I need help. It is knocking at heaven's door together with others. When you are stuck—sick—get help!

Matthew 18:18-20 indicates that when two or three get together, the Lord is present in a way that he is not when we are just by ourselves. Therefore, *"If any two of you agree as touching anything, they shall ask and it will be done for them."*

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 indicates the same thing when it says, *"Two are better than one because they have good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up."* So in calling for the elders, you are calling for the big guns to be brought to bear on a problem.

When James comes to the part about sickness, he says, *"Is any sick among you? "* As I look at that passage, that word "sickness" means weak or feeble. *"Is there anyone that's weak or feeble?"*

Is a Cold a Sickness?

I used to have a man at my church that would call me and he'd say, "Pastor, I need to have the elders come and pray for me. I have a cold."

Now, there's nothing wrong with him calling and trusting the Lord for his cold, but I don't think that's the application here. There are sicknesses that are normal processes of life that are going to come and go. All of us suffer from colds and flu from time to time. You can pray for recovery from a bad cold on your own. You don't need the elders to do that for you.

Can you imagine what would happen in a church of over 100 people if every time someone had a cold or the flu, they would call for the elders to come and pray over them? The intention here is not to encourage believers to call the elders for every sickness. If you are afflicted (troubled) with an illness, you should pray!

I don't want you to be afraid to bring your sicknesses to the Lord or to come to a pastor or elders and ask for prayer, but I want you to be careful that you're not running to the elders as though they are the solution. The elders are a part of a process here.

Nor should this passage be used to avoid doctors and medicines. God has placed herbs and medicinal plants in our world to help us.

Paul told Timothy, *"Timothy, I want you to take a little wine for your stomach and your oft infirmities."* (1 Timothy 5:23) He uses the same word that is used in James, "your infirmities or sicknesses." He didn't say, "Timothy, shame on you for being sick. You should call for the elders."

There are some things you're going to have to deal with on your own. So, take your medicine and call on the Lord yourself, and wade through it to get to the other side. Use whatever medicines are available to you.

The question in all this is WHEN DO I CALL FOR THE ELDERS?

When do I call on the elders? When do I ask to be anointed and prayed for? Is it like the extreme unction, when all else fails and I might die?

What should guide me? Here is my advice.

- 1) When the sickness is stubborn.**
- 2) When it's prolonged.**
- 3) When it's resistant to medicine.**
- 4) When it lays you down and you can't get up.**
- 5) When it puts you on the shelf that you cannot serve the Lord.**
- 6) When the Holy Spirit prompts you to call for the elders.**

When you are sick and realize you need help. You've already been praying on your own, but sometimes it's not enough just to pray on your own. Sometimes it's not enough just to take the medicine, because sometimes that disease needs a touch from the Lord.

Now, please, don't go away saying, "Pastor Dick wants to eliminate people coming to the altar to be prayed for for just anything." I didn't say that. I said, in my understanding of the passage, when you are troubled by your sickness, regardless of the trouble, bring it to the Lord with the elders. When you've done all that you can do, and the answer doesn't come, then you need the elders. There's a motive here.

A Personal Testimony

A few years ago, I was suffering with a calcium deposit in my mouth that broke through the skin and rubbed on the inside of my mouth. It was very painful. I went to a dentist, and he sent me on to an oral surgeon. The surgeon cut around it, ground it down, polished it down and gave me some high dosage medicines for pain. It was excruciating, but it didn't go away.

I had to go back twice to the dentist because it kept growing back. He even said, "It's unusual that it keeps coming back like this." He would file it down again and say, "Take two of these and call me in the morning." By the way, I loved the drugs

that I was taking. They were quite wonderful. They took the pain away. They also put me in a state of wonder. Nevertheless, the issue continued for almost six months. I was struggling. Even when I was preaching, it was rubbing my mouth raw. After preaching three services, I would go home and that thing literally rubbed the inside of my mouth bloody.

A brother in this church came to me and said, "Pastor, how come you haven't called for the elders to anoint and pray for you?" I responded, "Because the Lord hasn't told me to do that yet." I wasn't being evasive. I was being honest. I don't run to the altar asking the elders to pray for every pain I have. I wait on the Lord asking, "Lord, is this something you need to touch and heal?"

It was six months later that I was conducting a prayer retreat, and this thing was still very painful. I was speaking, and I was counseling with people throughout the days. At the last session of our time together while we were sitting in a circle, the Lord said, "Now you can ask them to pray for you." It was like a bolt of lightning. The Lord said, "Now you can ask them. Not just the elders that are here, but the brothers and sisters in Christ. Have them anoint and pray for you." I heard the voice of the Lord whisper that in my spirit. I obeyed, and I said, "Lord, this has been going on for six months. It's painful, and I need your help." They all gathered around me and laid hands on me and anointed me with oil, and prayed the prayer of faith.

When I woke up the next morning, I brushed my teeth and then realized there was no pain. I opened my mouth wide to look at that wound. There was no mark. There was no sign there was ever a problem there. The Lord healed it immediately and completely.

You need to be sensitive to the Lord and what he's speaking to your heart, and when he says, "You come to the altar because you have a sickness," whatever that sickness or that trouble is, you come because the Lord says so, not because Pastor Dick said you should or you shouldn't. You come because the Lord is prompting you and you come to seek him. The motive needs to be that you're sick, you're in trouble.

2. The Means – “You call for the elders”

The second step is the means. The means is, "The Call." James puts it into a firsthand personal responsibility. He says, "*Let him call for the elders to pray over you.*" This means the person who is sick has a personal responsibility to listen to God, and then to call upon the elders to be anointed and prayed for. Some churches host regular healing services where they encourage individuals to step forward with their sicknesses for prayer.

Our church had an open altar at the end of each service where the elders were instructed to be at the front of the sanctuary to pray with those who had needs, not just for healing. It was a great blessing as people became comfortable about staying after the service to be prayed for. That is not exactly what James instructs, but I think the initiative is still on the sick to make the first move. Pastors and elders are never instructed to go out to the highways, hedges to find sick people to pray for.

James didn't say to go to church to be prayed for. He could have said to anoint yourself with oil and pray a prayer of faith. But he didn't say that either. The point he was making was to put the onus of responsibility on the one who is sick to call for the elders. It exemplifies a step of faith on the part of the sick person.

My First Experience Calling Elders

I had this come to me rather abruptly when I was a teenager and suffering from an illness that would have disqualified me from the mission field. Although it was not a serious illness, it was quite troubling to me. I felt called to be a missionary. I had gone to the doctor for a physical and the doctor detected a disease. He said, "Well, you can't be a missionary. You've got a disease that's going to hinder you from going overseas." I went back home devastated. I talked to my mom and dad about it. My dad was really walking with the Lord at that time. My dad said, "Dick, if you really want to be healed, if you really think God has called you to be a missionary, maybe you should call for the elders and have them anoint and pray for you."

I was a 16-year-old. I was extremely shy. I had never spoken to an elder in my life. They were scary guys. I said, "Dad, would you call them for me?" My dad wisely said, "Dick, what does the Scripture say? "If you are sick, you call for the elders." I thought, "No way!" I really wondered whether it was better to stay sick than call the elders, because for me, that was a gigantic step of faith and courage.

As I prayed about it, the Lord prompted me, despite my misgivings, to call the elders. I felt that burden, the Lord saying, "You're sick. You have a need, and man doesn't have the solution for your need. Call the elders." So, I swallowed my pride and inhibitions and called one of the elders despite my nervousness. I said, "This is Dick LaFountain." He said, "Who?" I clarified, "Norman's son. Dick LaFountain." "Oh yeah, Dick. What can I do for you?" I made my requests known. "I would like the elders to anoint and pray for me after church on Sunday." He was impressed. He responded he would contact the elders to stay after church to anoint and pray for me. You see, our elders didn't normally gather at the front to pray for people after every service. It was only by special appointment. That Sunday came and by special appointment, the elders laid hands on me, anointed me with oil and trusted the Lord with me for my healing.

A week later, the last test came back on the disease. The doctor said, "I don't know what happened and where that diagnosis came from, but there is no sign of it in your system now." I had been completely healed. God does wonderful things when we listen to him.

James was saying, "Listen to your Lord Jesus Christ. He speaks to you. He whispers to you, and when you're sick enough, He will indicate to you that you need help, then you need to call for the elders." That doesn't mean you have to call ahead of time. I'm sure James was not referring to a phone call. It means when the elders are present, ask one of them to gather the others to pray for you. We are not to have a church full of eager-beaver elders running around chasing everybody with sicknesses so they can anoint and pray for them. That's not anointing, that's annoying, and it's not what God said. "When you are sick, you call or you come to the elders."

3. The Men

The third step, James names the ones who are to be called—THE ELDERS. Elders are an important ingredient in this process. There may be congregations that you associate with that don't have official elders. They may have deacons who function as elders. They reserve the term elder for the pastors.

What does that mean to call for the elders? Does that mean look for old guys in the church? Look for bald guys? Look for guys with beards? No, it means those who are

in spiritual authority, those who are spiritually mature, those who have a deep walk with God. Those men you have confidence in and in whom you can trust.

James was not talking about an elected position. In the New Testament, elders were appointed based on their proven faithfulness, rather than being elected.

(For a study of the requirements for elders, see in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:7-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-4.)

Unfortunately, in many churches and denominations, eldership is not a spiritual calling. It is a political election. They are elected because they are wise, influential, educated, popular or just available. Churches elect elders based on popularity, not on gifts and the calling of God. I have a good friend who pastors a small denominational church where they have only one elder. My friend lamented, "I'm not even sure if he is saved, but he's the only man we have available!"

I have had elders who are not people-persons; they are introverts and don't have gifts for interpersonal relationships. I have had other elders who are businessmen and have no spiritual gifts for eldership. I pastored one church that allowed for just six elders to be elected every two years. Our church was growing rapidly with over 500 people, so we needed more elders. It was hard even to find men qualified and willing to be elected as elders. I have found that most elders don't enjoy going to meetings. Our elders composed a majority of the church board and had to attend monthly elder meetings as well.

One year, I approached all the men who had been elders to see if they would be willing to serve again. They weren't. Then I went to each one and asked if they would be willing to be a praying elder with no meetings to attend. If instead they would pray with people when called upon. Every one of them said they would be happy to be a PRAYING ELDER. I'd rather have a few praying elders than an army of administrative elders.

Eldership is a position before the Lord. It is a noble spiritual calling. Although the Scripture says an elder must be the husband of one wife, which prevents women being elders, I believe there are women who are mature saints who are filled with faith and gifts of the Spirit who can be called upon to pray with the sick.

In 2 John the Apostle writes to a woman who he called "*the chosen lady*," indicating a deeply spiritual and godly saint. I wouldn't hesitate to call on such a lady to pray for and anoint the sick together with the elders. In fact, sometimes it is preferable to have women praying with women, especially when dealing with female health issues. We often will ask godly wives of elders to stand with us in prayer over women. Women are not elders as such, but I believe they can join in with us in prayer.

In today's society, someone will take issue with whether elders are only men, or is it permissible for women to function as elders in the church? That is an issue for your local church congregation and its polity.

Personally, I believe God calls on men to be the spiritual leaders of the church, godly men, not just men. Sometimes when there are no qualified godly men in the congregation to act as elders, I believe the Lord raises up women to fill that role. In any event, the instructions and qualifications for elders are clear in Scriptures. Godliness trumps gender every time. That's where we ought to begin.

You can wrestle with women serving as elders all you want. I'm not suggesting they serve as elders, but many times women are more sensitive and faith-filled than men in the congregation. I would rather have a godly woman of faith anoint and pray for me than ten lukewarm elders who have no faith. That's my opinion. You can have your own opinion, but I believe women have just as much power with God as men do.

"Call for the elders," that means call for the mature saints, the holy men (or women), men of God, men of prayer, men filled with the Holy Spirit to gather around you and to pray for you, with you, and over you. They do not heal you, but they stand with you, trusting God to do the healing. They are joining their faith with your faith. It's the combined faith and prayers of all of them, going to the throne and agreeing as they pray for your healing.

Jesus said,

"Again, I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven." – Matthew 18:10

Why call for the elders?

The elders are spiritual leaders, mature saints, holy men and women of God. Why are they chosen?

1. Their faith – Matthew 17:18-20
2. Their combined prayers – Matthew 18:18-20
3. Their authority – Matthew 10:8, Luke 9:1-2
4. Their discernment – Proverbs 11:14
5. Their gifts –word of faith, wisdom, knowledge – 1 Corinthians 12:8-9
6. Their continued support, encouragement, & prayers – James 6:18

The elder's spiritual authority is operative in this prayer.

It is the authority given to them by Christ. They should be mature spiritual men who know how to speak to the enemy. They should know how to chase the enemy away. They should know how to claim the promises of God. They have the Holy Spirit's fullness to exercise their gifts and discernment concerning the sickness. They ought to be discerning whether this sickness was because of sin, or whether there's demonic activity, or whether this is perhaps something God wants the person to endure. All of that is part of that process.

Their gifts need to be operative.

I believe this to be part of the process of calling for the elders. Elders ought to exercise their gifts in this context. One may have the gift of faith. He needs to use it. Another may have a word of knowledge or a word of wisdom. He ought to use it.

When you are being anointed for healing, it is not necessary for miraculous gifts to be present. Not everyone has a miraculous gift. Not all elders have dynamic gifts, but in that mix, there ought to be a few who have special gifts of the Holy Spirit. There ought to be those who have the spirit of discernment. The gift of discernment can immediately tell whether there's a grieving of the Spirit or not. There ought to be some others that have the word of knowledge or exhortation where they're able to take the Scriptures from memory and apply them to your situation. That can be extremely helpful.

Finally, you have the elders as your continued support.

I want my congregation to know when you come to an altar and I pray for you, I will continue to pray for you throughout the week, and sometimes for weeks and months, until the Lord answers. That is why I usually leave our prayer time asking them to let me know when the Lord answers, not if the Lord answers, but when He answers. I expect Him to answer. I've had several people that I have prayed for, with, and over for well over a year.

I remember praying for one young lady who was having trouble with a young man. He was not a godly young man and had been abusive to her. We prayed over that,

binding the enemy from harming her, and asking God to deliver her from this harmful relationship. I told her I would continue to pray until God answered. As it happened, our paths did not cross again for nearly a year. One Sunday, I encountered her in the hallway and asked, "Oh, how's that situation I've been praying for?" She looked shocked and said, "Oh, pastor, that went away two weeks after you prayed for me. I'm sorry. I forgot to tell you."

Please tell your pastor or elders when God answers. When the Lord heals you, when God answers prayer, there ought to be a shout that goes up to heaven from earth. Everybody ought to know about it. Too often God heals, God answers prayer, God does a mighty work and we tell no one.

"Call for the elders." Now somebody is going to say, "But what if it's a women's meeting?" Call on godly women in that moment and have them pray for you. In all our church meetings, the women are under the authority of this pastor and the elders. They are not usurping authority to pray for the sick. They have been given that authority. If they are teaching in our church, we, the pastor and elders, have delegated authority to them. They are not usurping authority. We have given them the authority to pray for you, and so, yes, call on them to pray for you, with you, and over you.

A Personal Question: What Is Your Practice?

I'm not saying which is right or wrong. I am just attempting to judge your attitudes and actions as regards healing. I think we should be honest with ourselves about what we are accustomed to doing. We all have habits. What is your habit? Where are you on this continuum?

1. I call on Jesus only + no doctors or medicines.
2. I call on Jesus first + natural options, vitamins, herbs, and diet.
3. I call on Jesus first + natural options 2nd, doctors, medicines third.
4. I call on doctors & medicines 1st, Jesus 2nd, then natural options.
5. I call on doctors & medicines & etc, and a little bit of prayer.
6. I call on Jesus as a last resort when all else fails.

When Do YOU Call for the Elders?

1. Do you first go to Jesus? How? How long do you wait? Do you wait?
2. Do you go to doctors first, get their diagnosis, and then ask Jesus?
3. Do you go to doctors, depend on medicines, and then ask Jesus?
4. Do you go to doctors, take medicines, surgeries, etc. then ask Jesus?
5. Do you ask Jesus to guide the doctors, medications, and surgeries, and hope for the best?

I am not passing judgment on any of the above. I am just asking diagnostic questions to see if you have thought through your healing strategies.

I suppose I do all the above at some time or other, depending on the circumstance. I assume all of us pray when we are sick or hurting. If I fall, break a bone, or get bit by a dog or snake, I go to the ER first as I pray. If I have a flu bug that is intense and won't go away with over-the-counter medicines, of course I pray, but I also will go to the doctor for antibiotics. If I suspect I have COVID-19, I want to get an early diagnosis so that doctors can treat it. If I am not feeling well over a long period and, I've asked the Lord to make me better, if I don't improve I go to a doctor to have a check-up, exams, diagnostics, X-rays, MRIs, etc. This is not a lack of faith in God, it is wisdom.

If the doctor finds I have heart issues, I may go to have stents put in, open-heart surgery, or ablations, all the while asking the Lord to heal me, with or without the doctors and medicines. If he tells me I have cancer, tumors, or something worse, I want him to do all he can, humanly and medically, while I pray and call on the church to pray.

Think About It

Chapter 7:

Deliver the Goods

Part 1 – Motive, Means, Men

Have you ever called on the elders to pray for healing?

Do you know who your elders are? Do you trust them?

Who would you trust call on to pray for your healing?

