



“Faith’s Response to Weakness” Pt 2

Today we continue our exploration of faith’s response to weakness.

IX. Faith’s response to weakness 5:14-18

Ask for help and confess sins

Here James instructs those in a state of weakness to ask for help and confess sins.

He then he prescribes a process, includes instructions for the elders and anticipates a glorious outcome.

A. The Instructions 5:14-17

1. The circumstance – weakness

Is anyone among you without strength (weak)? James 5:14a

Most of your translations opt for the word “sick”. As we discovered last week, specific words communicate a range of nuance or meaning. The context in which the word is used provides the clues as to what nuance may be intended. “I love pizza” obviously communicates a culinary connection to pizza. “I love my wife” obviously communicates a different kind of connection. Over time the nuances of specific word become generally recognized. The term translated “sick” in most Bible versions comes from a Greek root word meaning “strength” preceded by a negative; resulting in a word meaning not strong or weak. I prefer to translate this passage “Is anyone **without strength** rather than sick?”. Or “is anyone weak among you?”

Last week we explore the various nuances of the word by tracking its usage in the New Testament.

a. Physical weakness - sickness

b. Weakness flesh

*Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.”
Matthew 26:41*

c. Emotional weakness

*I was with you in **weakness** and in fear and in much trembling, 1 Cor. 2:3*

James also used a synonym in verse 15 for “weak”.

*Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow **weary** or fainthearted. Hebrews 12:3*

*And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the **weak**, be patient with them all. 1 Thessalonians 5:14*

d. Weakness of faith or spiritual weakness

*Without becoming **weak** in faith Abraham contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; Romans 4:19*

*Accept the one who is **weak** in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. Rom 14:1*

e. Demonically distressed

It was used to describe the stat of one in some way affected by demonic influence.

f. General Inability

The term has a wide range of meaning spanning every aspect of our life. Weakness of body, soul, spirit, mind, will, emotions, abilities. The book of James addresses all manner of weakness in the church family. James provides a prescription for weakness in the church. He first addresses the one experiencing weakness and then the ones tasked with helping them.

2. The conduct of the weak 5:14a, 16

a. Call for the elders of the church 5:14a

Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church...James 5:14

This is the word **pros** kaleo which means to call toward or to one's self. It means to invite someone into your life to help. Who do we call? We call for the elders of the church which could mean the official elders of the church or the term could also refer to those older and mature in the church. The plural use of the term indicates we are to invite more than one.

b. Confess sins to one another 5:16

A second action occurs in verse 16 where James summarizes the process.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another... James 5:16

James moved from providing instruction to any individual member of the family struggling at a specific time with weakness to instruction for the whole church family to develop a practice of confessing sins to one another and praying for one another.

The term translated "confess" comes from two terms "same" and "say". It had to do with an acknowledgement of something or a declaration of agreement. To say the same thing. Be willing to call sin as God sees it. We honestly acknowledge our struggle. We willingly humble ourselves and evaluate our life according to God's standard. Sometimes our weakness directly relates to something in our life. Anger, bitterness, unforgiveness, moral failure, guilt, rebellion, disobedience, doubt. Neglect of our spiritual health can weaken any area of our life from the physical to the spiritual. James lays the responsibility to ask for help on the one experiencing weakness in their life. James instructed them to invite mature believers to help them address their weakness. James called for an openness about their life at any of these categories. Why isn't this a regular practice in churches today? Fear, bad experience, pride, lack of trust in other people, embarrassment.

3. The conduct of the elders 5:14b

So, what are the "elders to do?"

James included specific instructions for them.

Is anyone among you without strength? Call for the elders of the church, and let them pray on him, having anointed him with oil in the name of the Lord. James 5:14

a. Anoint with oil in the name of the Lord

Even though the instruction to pray comes first, the action indicated by the used of a participle indicates that the anointing comes before the praying. "Let them pray, **having anointed** with oil (previous to prayer)." Anointing with oil in Jewish tradition was a symbol of God's favor and blessing. Perhaps the gesture affirmed God's love and care for the person being prayed for.

b. Pray in faith

This is the regular word for petition, supplication, request and sometimes even worship. Here they were to pray "on" or "upon". Laying hands? The pray would be offered with the assurance of God's willingness and ability to answer. Perhaps it indicated some signal from God that he was willing to act on their behalf.

4. The anticipated outcome 5:15-16

James provided a notable variety of life-change words in response to the prayer of faith. Notice it is neither the elders nor the oil nor the specific prayer that actually does the work. It is the LORD who produces results in accord with His sovereign will. I found a surpassing correlation between the range of meaning of the four life-change words or results with the range of meaning we discovered with the word “weakness.”

The prayer in faith will bring...

a. Salvation

*And the prayer of faith will **save** the one who is weak James 5:15*

James used a synonym for weakness here meaning weary, faithless, tired, sick. The verb is a common term usually translated save or salvation. The New Testament employs the noun and verb 159 times. It also has a range of meaning anywhere from deliverance from physical danger or death (disciples in the storm, Peter on the water), physical healing (i.e. the woman who touched Jesus’ garment), deliverance from demonization (Luke 8:36).

James wrote earlier about the implanted word of God able to deliver the soul. Jesus asked the Father to “save” his troubled soul from the trauma ahead. Its most extensive use is in a spiritual sense of deliverance, rescue, protection, making well. It is used regarding initial salvation (i.e. no other name by which we must be saved), an on-going deliverance (are being saved) and the ultimate salvation for which all believers hope. It is interesting to note that the range of meaning for this word parallels the range of possible meanings of the word for “weakness” discusses previously.

b. Restoration

*And the prayer of faith will **will raise him up** the one who is sick, and the Lord **will raise him up**. James 5:15*

This is another extensively used (141) New Testament term. The basic meaning is to gather one’s faculties, awaken from sleep, raise from sitting or inactivity, raise from disease and death. Paul wrote, “We are raised to bear fruit, raised to walk in newness of life.” Here the result of prayer seems to be that the Lord will restore, raise up the one suffering weakness to usefulness again. Paul has something similar in mind.

We do not lose heart (emotional weakness). Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16

Perhaps the prayer of faith restores one’s outlook, raises one’s perspective, encourages, lifts out of heaviness, in addition to physical healing or deliverance.

c. Forgiveness

*And the prayer of faith will **save** the one who is weak, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be **forgiven**. James 5:15*

James used a perfect tense verb indicating one who has possibly committed sins at one time struggling under continued consequences of that sin. Guilt ravages the soul and the body. This prayer of faith offers forgiveness where sin has been a factor in the weakness. This prayer of faith brings a new sense of God’s love and forgiveness, lifting out of the enemy’s condemnation and doubt.

d. Healing

*Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be **healed**. James 5:16*

Again, James moved from the result for the individual calling the elders to them, to a healing dynamic regularly taking place in the great church family through on-going mutual confession and intercession. James used yet another word for healing with a broad range of application.

Physical healing of all kinds. John 5:13 blind, lame Act 9:34; Servants ear Luke 22:51; healed of diseases Lk 6:18

Spiritual healing from spiritual blindness to understanding of truth. John 12:40

Deliverance from demonic activity.

Canaanite woman's daughter. Matt 15:21-28

The fathers mute, suicidal autistic son Luke 9:42

Jesus doing good and healing all those dominated by the devil Ac 10:38

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached - how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. Acts 10:37-38

Spiritual lameness Heb 12:13

Spiritual straying healed and restored by the sacrifice of Jesus 1 Pet 2:24-25

James prescribed a process whereby those suffering from weakness in a variety of categories in their life could find relief by humbly asking for prayer and confessing sin. James attached a monumental insight or principle to his prescription.

B. Insight 5:16-18

1. The insight stated 5:16

The prayer of a righteous person has great ability as it is working. James 5:16

There is great ability in prayer. There is divine energy in prayer offered by God's people. God acts in response to His people. The power and ability of the prayer of faith is clear. What did he mean by "righteous" person? James included an illustration of a righteous person.

2. The insight illustrated by Elijah 5:17-18

Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit. James 5:17-18

Observe a couple things here.

First, Elijah was not a super hero.

He struggled with the same struggles as the rest of humanity.

Second, Elijah listened to and obeyed God.

In our study of Elijah some time ago we observed that Elijah lived his life according to God's instructions. Most of the movements in Elijah's life began with a word from the Lord. James informs us something not in the original record. James tells us that Elijah prayed that it wouldn't rain. The historical record says nothing about Elijah praying it wouldn't rain.

Now Elijah the Tishbite, of Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word." 1 Kings 17:1

Whether he prayed before this encounter with Ahab or after, we don't know. We do have the record of Elijah praying for it to rain. First God instructed Elijah to confront Ahab and promised to send rain.

After many days the word of the LORD came to Elijah, in the third year, saying, "Go, show yourself to Ahab, and I will send rain upon the earth." 1 Kings 18:1

Then after the Mountain showdown with the priests of Baal, Elijah announced rain to Ahab.

Then he prayed for the rain.

And Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is a sound of the rushing of rain." So Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel. And he bowed himself down on the earth and put his face between his knees. And he said to his servant, "Go up now, look toward the sea." And he went up and looked and said, "There is nothing." And he said, "Go again," seven times. And at the seventh time he said, "Behold, a little cloud like a man's hand is rising from the sea." And he said, "Go up, say to Ahab, 'Prepare your chariot and go down, lest the rain stop you.'" And in a little while the heavens grew black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. 1 Kings 18:41-45

Elijah's prayers were based on God's promise. God predicted that He would stop the rain if Israel followed other gods. God promised Elijah He would send rain. God answers prayer in accord with His will. God answers prayer in answer to His promises. That brings us to the elephant in the room. Why don't we see more salvation, raising up, forgiveness and healing in response to our prayers?

Personal Sin

An unwillingness to humble ourselves and confess our sin.

Too much of a focus on the physical.

We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 2 Corinthians 4:16

God isn't able.

God isn't willing for one reason or another (sovereignty of God)

Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. 2 Timothy 4:20

Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Philippians 2:27

No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. 1 Timothy 5:23

Lack of faith.

The curse – everybody dies of something

Higher purpose for me or others

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10