

A brief study on praying for...

Divine Healing



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INTRODUCTION

Divine healing is a subject oft-neglected in non-charismatic churches. This preacher spent part of his childhood in Assemblies of God churches, up until about age 10. About half of my extended family still is part of this denomination, and I myself have experienced anywhere from the mild-Pentecostal churches to the extreme charismatic kinds like what is seen on the TBN TV channel. I have witnessed each of these as both a child and as an adult. My eventual conversion and experience as a minister in the Christian Churches and Churches of Christ has taught me much about divine healing, although it is rarely discussed in our brotherhood.

With all the spectacle and fanaticism behind so-called modern divine healing, is negating this subject justified? Is there anything to be gained wading into this controversial issue?

This author thinks that a Biblical understanding of divine healing, both past and present, can be very helpful for two reasons: 1) it clears the air about what Scriptural divine healing really is, and 2) we can understand the place divine healing could potentially have in our individual lives and in our churches.

First, there are some generally-accepted Bible truths about divine healing:

- 1) God has healed in the past, and God can certainly heal today if He so chooses to.
- 2) There many Biblical stories and other Scriptural references about divine healing.
- 3) In the Bible, God granted some people the ability to heal.

4) We can pray for healing.

With the above in mind, it is *very important* to understand each of the above in context of Scripture. There is far more misunderstanding about divine healing than understanding, and much more abuse of this subject than perhaps any other in all of Christendom at large (although this author will admit the list of misunderstandings on any spiritual subject seems to be growing by the day).

GOD’S WILL AND DIVINE HEALING

It is of first and foremost importance to understand that divine healing is only of God’s will. We cannot force God to do anything, heal us, or anyone else, nor can we give healing by our own authority. *There is no magic formula for divine healing.* Thus, the most basic thing to understand about divine healing is that if God chooses to heal, He will heal. If He does not choose to heal, then He will not heal.

Ten Facts About the Authority Behind Divine Healing
1) We cannot “force” divine healing.
2) We do not have the authority to divinely heal on our own.
3) There is <u>no magic formula</u> to guarantee a divine healing.
4) If God chooses to heal, He will heal.
5) If God chooses not to heal, then He will not heal.
6) Sometimes God heals because we ask.
7) Sometimes God does not heal <u>because we have not asked.</u>
8) Sometimes God does not heal <u>because we have not been faithful.</u>
9) Sometimes God does not heal <u>because we ask with the wrong motive.</u>
10) Sometimes God heals for His own purpose outside any other reason.

Scripture seems to indicate at multiple points that we can enjoy blessings (including divine healing) of God through faith, prayer,

obedience, and courage. There is even indication that some illness and even death in some cases can come from disobedience or flippancy (1 Corinthians 11:27-34). Each of these things must be investigated thoroughly in the context of Scripture if the reader is going to have a wholesome concept of this controversial subject.

Oft-Ignored Scriptural Fact:

1 Corinthians 11:29-30: “²⁹For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.”

If this study is best understood, the reader will come away with the following chief impressions: 1) God heals, 2) sometimes God heals based on our faith, prayer, obedience, and courage, and 3) sometimes God renders sickness or even death based on unfaithfulness or flippancy, and therefore **this subject cannot be approached lightly or selfishly.**

DIVINE HEALING IS UNIQUELY-DIVINE

Many skeptics reject divine healing because, quite honestly, divine healing is not a consistently-repeatable phenomenon, like chemicals in a laboratory. This author will admit that this would make divine healing less of a debate in *some* circles. However, this author asserts that there is ample (even overwhelming) evidence of divine healing if one genuinely wishes to seek out its truthfulness. I will attempt to reveal some of this evidence, and explain to the best of my ability why God does not render divine healing like clockwork, but rather in His own time and by His own choice, for His own purpose, *sometimes* by our requests.

First, divine healing is not a simple transaction of faith and then blessing, as it is sometimes taught. Instead, divine healing can be summed up in the following: divine healing occurs when God's chooses to heal, or sometimes as a result of a person's prayer, courage, living, and faith. Therefore, we will also see that sometimes divine healing does not occur because of a person's prayerlessness, cowardice, unfaithfulness, or unbelief. In fact, these things are taught in Scripture to potentially render divine judgment (illness, even death – again, 1 Corinthians 11:27-34).

That word *sometimes* is exactly what makes divine healing inherently un-testable like chemicals in a laboratory. Why does God only heal sometimes? The basic answer is **God is not a performer waiting to put on a show**. God has nothing to prove (Job 38:1-3), and certainly has no requirement on any level to prove anything to anyone.

Jesus Himself said, "If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31; John 5:46-47 is a similar parallel passage). Otherwise, the testimony of Scripture is that the Bible is at least as convincing as any miracle that God's power is real, and if one already has a supposition against the Bible, a miracle will not make any difference. As well, John the Baptist did not perform any miracle, and yet was the greatest man born of woman, according to Jesus (John 10:41, Matthew 11:11). John had a hugely successful ministry with just preaching and water – is it not sufficient we have the exact same tools today?

Key Verses

- 1) "Many people came to him. They said, "Though John never performed a sign, all that John said about this man was true." – John 10:41
- 2) "Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" – Matthew 11:11a

Conclusion: John was a preacher and a baptizer. He performed no miracle. He was the *greatest man born of woman*. **Greatness is not miracles!**

Truly, I (and many others) can testify that many people have witnessed miracles and simply rejected the miracles. I have been in nursing homes, hospitals, and private homes - by bedsides - where people have recovered beyond any hope, who have lived longer as Hezekiah did (2 Kings 20:1-6; Isaiah 38:1-5), and who have seen other improvements, but still are not moved by such divine intervention. *A partial reason people do not believe in divine intervention is because **they have a presupposition (belief) against it.*** These people believe, with no evidence to the contrary, that “something unknown” to doctor or computer or mankind somehow naturally – accidentally even – “fixed” whatever was wrong. It takes great faith *not* to believe in miracles in those cases! (Why any survey will show you 70% of M.D.’s believe in miracles)

The other reason is likely much more common: belief in an act of divine intervention would create an obligation to God in most people’s minds, something *they do not want*.

However, what is shocking is that 80% of people believe in miracles and perhaps more astounding, 73% of doctors do too (A Survey of 1,100 doctors by HCD Research and the Louis Finkelstein, 2004). The witness of professionals and lay people alike in the world of medicine *testifies to the truth of divine healing*. However, how can we be certain? The skeptic would say this is a case of mass hallucination or delusion, or perhaps people simply attribute to miracle what they do not understand.

Key Thought:

“Belief in divine healing would create an obligation to God in most

people's minds, an obligation *many people do not want.*"

The skeptic commonly asserts the supposed bullet-proof evidence: "God does not heal amputees." In fact, there is a large, skeptic-driven website to that effect (whywontgodhealamputees.com/). Is this true? Does God not heal amputees? Is this smoking-gun evidence that cannot be refuted?

There are many good answers to this question, but this author will attempt to simply address the most convincing:

1) This is an argument from negative ("Why does God not [fill in the blank]..."), which is inherently impossible to prove. It is no different than saying, "Why does God not give me all the money I want?" Quite simply, what obligation does God (or anyone) have to you? As God Himself says in Job 41:11, "Who has a claim against Me that I must repay?"

Key Verse:

Job 41:11, "Who has a claim against Me that I must repay?"

Or, to phrase it another way, "To whom does God owe anything?"

Answer: No one.

2) This question is always asked with the presupposition that God *must* heal amputees, or all other divine works are otherwise false. This is like saying, "Since a Corvette has a V8, it must be able to pull a 37' trailer." Saying that God must heal amputees or all of his other divine works are necessarily false, is like saying a powerful car with a big engine *must* also do something *irrelevant* to its existence. If God does not heal

amputees, we may think that unfortunate, but it is *irrelevant* to His divine workings otherwise.

3) It is interesting that Scripture never promises the power to heal amputees, and not even Jesus Himself ever healed an amputee (unless you count Jesus' healing Malchus' ear – Luke 22:50-51). Jesus and the Apostles did heal “the lame” several times in Scripture, but this is not the creation of new flesh and bone where there was not, but was always *the healing of something already there*. The question of the amputee is one of pure speculation such as, “Why did God give me green eyes when I prefer blue?”

4) Scripture testifies many times that miracles do not produce faith. Miracles served two exclusive purposes before Scripture was completed: 1) to confirm the preached message, and 2) get the attention of those who witnessed the miracle so they would consider the spoken Word of God. Romans 10:17 says explicitly, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” God does not perform on cue because regardless of what people think, it is not the lack of miracle that keeps them in unbelief, but rather their own consistent choice not to believe.

There are many other good answers to this question, but to focus on this question solely is not the focus of this booklet. Rather, the reader should understand that divine healing is not for the purpose of witnessing to others, but rather is a blessing given by God by His choice and sometimes in response to prayer, faith, right living, and courage. Always keep in mind that Scripture itself tells us that the truth of Scripture will have far more of an impact than any miracle, no matter how spectacular (Luke 16:31).

What about mass hallucination or delusion? Do 80% of the population, and 73% of doctors, believe in miracles because they are crazy en masse, or believe falsehoods hook, line, and sinker?

First, mass hallucination is a myth in its conventionally understood form. Conversion disorder is a real mass disorder, but it manifests itself in the mass duplication of physical symptoms among a population, not simultaneous adoption of all the same beliefs. Second, mass delusion is limited to many people saying they witnessed the same thing that never actually happened. Some would say that is the very definition of a divine miraculous healing that is attested to by many, *but in many cases* the evidence of a person who recovered from terminal illness, or who “officially died” on the operating table but somehow resuscitated, or some other *true* event, the testimony is not questioned – but rather “how” the “miracle” happened is all that is up for debate. Neither case gives evidence to en masse craziness or simultaneously-believed falsehoods. Each time, the burden of how divine healing occurred outside of all other indicators is on the unbeliever, not the believer.

Key Quote:

G.K. Chesterson: “The believers in miracles accept them because they have evidence for them; the unbelievers in miracles reject them because they have a doctrine against them.”

HOW TO PRAY FOR DIVINE HEALING

The following “how to” may seem formulaic. Many well-intending believers reject any kind of “formal” approach to prayer, healing, or any other kind of divine intervention because they view such an approach as impersonal, insincere, or limiting. However, Jesus and His Apostles absolutely do give us instructions on living, praying, faith, and courage

that are to be followed regardless if we are seeking divine healing or not. This author does not treat any command of Jesus or His Apostles as optional; each is to be understood as a divine ordinance, and to reject Jesus or His Apostles' instructions on prayer, faith, living, or courage is to reject not only God's divine orders, but also to reject God's potential blessings, including divine healing.

First, it is important to understand that the prayers of the faithless, cowardly, flippant, or disobedient are ardently useless to receive God's direct, divine blessings. Balaam, a prophet chosen of God, prayed that he would "die the death of a righteous man" (Numbers 23:10). Instead, his greed and great sin of causing the Israelites to fall into whoredom resulted in his own death, condemnation, and use as an example of evil throughout the Bible (2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11; Revelation 2:14). Balaam's prayer even as a prophet of God did him no good in the face of his own sinful decisions.

Second, it is important to understand God's purpose in divine healing is not to win the lost. God is not putting on a show for unbelievers (1 Corinthians 14:23). In Scripture, faith simply does **not** come by miracle – faith comes by hearing the Word of God through preaching (Romans 10:10-17).

God's Purpose in Healing:

God's purpose in divine healing is to bless and encourage the courageous faithful in the form of an answered prayer, ultimately aiding that person to further the overall plan of His Kingdom.

Sometimes God heals a person because they really do have unfinished business for the Kingdom. Almost always, I have found, a

person who has received divine healing from God prayed (or was prayed for) in part to be able to fulfill a spiritual purpose.

Other times, a tough truth is that sometimes God does not heal because He already knows that person's Kingdom purpose is finished. If we have God's perspective as expressed by the Apostle Paul, we really would not tarry in this life any longer than we have to anyway (Philippians 1:21-26). A prayer to live just because we do not want to die does not serve God's purpose and it is hard to imagine such a prayer would be honored.

Third, although faith certainly plays a role in answered prayer to the effect of divine healing, it is not a matter of having "enough of it." So many preach (especially "prosperity" false-gospel preachers) that if a person has "enough faith", they can be rich, healthy, famous, or anything else they want. This falsehood has driven poor people poorer (making already-wealthy TV preachers even wealthier at the poor's expense), because they have come to believe that faith is like flour, poured into a bowl until there is enough to make "the miracle-recipe."

What is Faith?
<u>Faith is faithfulness.</u>
Faith is not a unit of measure designed to force a miracle.

The damage this view has caused is immense but this booklet will only discuss the most damning of evidence against viewing faith as a measured substance:

1) As discussed before, God's will alone ultimately determines a miracle's occurrence. Even if faith was measured like flour, no amount of

it gives us authority over the will of God to exercise divine power at our own whim. No one on earth has this authority (Matthew 28:18).

2) Faith is ultimately a choice, not a feeling, just like true love is chosen, not always felt (John 3:16 – God loved the world – but He certainly did not “feel good” about condemning His Son to death on a cross!). Commitments held fast have many periods of doubt, anger, and even mistakes. However, commitments held fast endure to the end (Revelation 2:10). Faith is much like this: faith is a commitment to God, and that faith says that *whatever* happens, the person who committed trusts God’s plan for his or her life. That kind of faith *sometimes* brings about miracles, such as divine healing. Faith *is* faithfulness. Let it be known that no miracle ever relied on mere feelings.

3) Faith, as defined by the eighteen specific, obedient heroes of Hebrews 11, is ***always an obedient faith***. Some of these specific heroes mentioned were more faithful than others, and some not until their last miracle (and event) in their lives, like Samson, but nonetheless an obedient faith is the only faith God honors for the purpose of divine intervention (James 2:17-24).

Faith also takes the form of “believing God.” James 1:6-8 must be studied in context to understand what is being taught about faith. James here says, “...you must believe and not doubt...” This preacher struggled with this verse for years, because if there is anything I struggle with *emotionally*, it is doubt. However, there is a difference between “feeling doubtful” and “choosing doubt above God’s power.” A person is not condemned for their feelings or temptations that are stirred up from them (Hebrews 4:15), even “feelings of doubt.” Rather, when I pray (i.e. “ask”) God for divine healing (or any kind of divine blessing),

do I believe God can do it if He so chooses, or do I believe God is actually unable to fulfill my request?

The former is “believing God”, in the context of a prayer request. The latter is the doubt James speaks of. The condemning kind of doubt is the kind that believes anything on a whim (vs. 6, gullibility), is unstable in all his ways (vs. 8), and says one thing and then does another habitually (vs. 8). Otherwise, the kind of doubt that prevents a prayer request from having potential divine intervention is **not** the feeling of doubt, but rather the habit of doubtful living – gullibility (readily influenced by the world), instability in *everything* a person does (literally, “not keeping commitments”), and finally double-mindedness (habitually lying by saying one thing and doing another). The reader may notice that how one lives matters a great deal more than how one feels; in fact, it is infinitely more important:

Job felt lower than dirt when he had an attitude of “repentance” before God after the righteous lecture he endured, *even though he had not sinned* (Job 42:7-8). Job had God-approved courage throughout his great trials despite his feelings of doubt and anger because in the end He still trusted God’s plan was right, although he himself could not possibly understand it (Job 42:2-3).

About Doubt:

“The kind of doubt that prevents a prayer request from having potential divine intervention... is the habit of doubtful living...”

Courage, like Job’s, is also mentioned through Scripture as a prerequisite for God’s intervention. Again, courage is a choice, not a feeling. One may very well feel doubt, fear, anger, etc. but not sin nor

disbelieve God (Hebrews 4:15). Courage is choosing to obey God's path despite the potential physical, emotional, vocational or other hazards for doing so.

Job is a good example of one who had questions for God, expressed doubt, fear, despair, and anger but did not sin. Job had courage to endure even when every physical symptom, familial tie, and emotion tempted him otherwise. Likewise, a person's courage in their prayer life is not about how they feel in the moment, but rather what they are resolved to do.

Courage to do what is right falls right in line with obeying God, or being faithful. You might say courage is the genuine intent to obey God that immediately precedes actual obedience to God. Feelings of any kind are not required to have courage or obey; in fact, many righteous, brave people will testify they were "scared to death" many times in their various trials.

Finally, after courage, obedience, and faith, comes the "prayer of a righteous man [that] is highly effective" (James 5:16).

Although a whole treatise could be written on "how to pray", for the sake of focusing on praying for divine healing (or other blessed interventions), a summary will be given:

Scripture commands us to...

1) Address God the Father, in the name [by the authority] of Jesus (Matthew 6:9ff; Luke 11:1ff; 1 Corinthians 1:1-2)

2) Present our specific requests to God (the Greek word "pray" simply means "ask"; a prayer without a request is not technically a prayer)

at all) and that our requests will be in accordance with the will of God (John 16:24, 26+27; 1 John 5:14).

3) Give thanks (Colossians 4:2)

4) End our prayers with “Amen” (meaning, “I agree”, specifically, “I agree/submit to God’s plan” (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4)

5) Pray repeatedly, regularly, and specifically (Luke 18:1ff; 1 Thessalonians 5:17; James 4:2)

6) Pray for others also repeatedly, regularly, and specifically (Colossians 4:3)

7) Pray both privately and publicly with other believers repeatedly, regularly, and specifically (Jesus, Peter, Paul, John and others all prayed for others, privately and publicly, dozens of times in the Scriptures)

8) Optionally – if physically possible – kneeling and/or fasting can be utilized temporarily, voluntarily, and specifically for prayer requests.

With our faith, obedience, courage, and prayers in order by Scripture’s edicts, God will then answer yes or no to our requests. If yes, expect to see God’s handiwork! If no, expect God’s purposes to be made clear to you (Romans 12:2).

(The author respectfully references the reader to check out another booklet, “About Prayer”, available free at www.callaochristianchurch.org, for more specifics about prayer and the Bible’s teaching about it, including its role in divine healing and other possible acts of God)

WHAT ABOUT JAMES 5:14-15, HEALING BY ANOINTING?

To be certain we are studying the passage in context, I will quote James 5:13-18 immediately below:

¹³ Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ 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. ¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.”

James says emphatically in verse 15, “And the prayer offered in faith **will** make the sick person well...” It is this verse’s “guarantee” that engages many into pursuing this particular kind of divine healing through prayer by the anointing with oil by the elders of a church.

However, it can be easily stated that many have attempted this and simply not received the healing they were seeking. Many, especially in charismatic groups will say, “The person did not have enough faith” (quoting vs. 15 where James says, “in faith”). Or, in skeptical circles, people might say, “This was a waste of time.” Others simply do not know what to do with this verse, and quietly ignore it, hoping no one asks about it!

This author would like to propose an understanding that may help:

James was a half-brother to Jesus, and thus a contemporary of both him and the Apostles. James is considered to be many to one of the first books of the New Testament written, possibly as early as 45AD. To put this into perspective, Jesus likely died and rose again in 30AD. This would put James at the very early part of the New Testament's church's growth and development. In terms of the book of Acts, the book of James was probably written before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15.

This was a period in the early church where the Apostles were all alive, Paul's ministry had begun, and thus miracle-working was going on regularly as a testimony to the Word being preached (Acts 14:3, 2 Corinthians 12:11+12, Hebrews 2:3-4, and of course during Jesus' ministry while He was on earth). When the Apostles would lay hands on another, they would receive miraculous gifts (Acts 5:12, 6:5-8, 8:6-7, 17, 19:6, among many others), although those people could not pass on those gifts (that is why when all of the Apostles had died, and the generation following them, miracles ceased, as predicted in 1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Philip is an example of a preacher who was not an Apostle, had miraculous gifts (Acts 8:4ff), but never passed them on. Simon the Sorcerer, certainly not a righteous man, testified through Luke's writing that this was how miraculous power was passed (Acts 8:8-19). Paul himself admitted that in order for the church to receive miraculous power, he would have to make a trip there for them to receive it (Romans 1:11). Paul gave Timothy his gifts in the same manner (2 Timothy 1:6). Therefore, with no Apostles or first-generations Christians around, men no longer have miraculous power. Miracles by the hand of man have ceased because their purpose has been fulfilled in the completion of Scripture (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

Key Bible Fact:

There is no example of anyone in Scripture who had received miraculous gifts by the laying on of hands by an Apostle was able to pass miraculous gifts onto another.

This limited miracles by the hands of men to the Apostles and the first-generation of Christians who had received them by the laying on of an Apostle's hands.

This is how Paul explains it to the church at Rome (Romans 1:11).

What does this have to do with James? In James' time (early in the growth of the first church), it is perfectly reasonable to assume that there were many elders in many churches who had received miraculous powers by the laying on of hands by an Apostle. Therefore, many elders would have possessed miraculous gifts of healing to confirm the message they were commissioned to teach amongst their flocks (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9). James was saying do not neglect these gifts; they were temporary, precious, and to be used to confirm the Word preached by those elders. The churches at the time lacked all of the New Testament (parts of it had not been written or widely circulated yet) so the elders' words were backed by miraculous power, just like the words of Jesus, Peter, Paul, and others were.

1 Corinthians 11-13 discusses people of all kinds who had received powers by the hands of an Apostle but were using them improperly. The proper use was the miracles to be used to confirm the Word. Healing, just like in Jesus', Peter's, and Paul's ministries, was a useful tool for confirming the preached Word of God.

Key Quote:

James was saying to the elders, "Do not neglect these gifts"; they were temporary, precious, and to be used to confirm the Word preached by those elders before the New Testament was completed and widely

distributed.

So, without miraculous gifts by the hands of God today, should elders anoint with oil those who are sick, praying for their healing? Absolutely, they should. Although the ability to heal is no longer in the hands of man, it is certainly in God's, and although the "guarantee" of healing is no longer provided (as the Word of God is complete and its testimony confirmed, so divine healing no longer serves the purpose of confirming the Word), it is a Biblical act of prayer offered up in obedience (faith), which is certainly Scriptural. If God honors the request "yes", it is not because of the oil but because He sees a purpose for His Kingdom in the prayer offered (Romans 8:28). If He does not heal, the Scriptures say we will be able to discern His will in it if we have the Word of God educated in our minds (Romans 12:2).

What Can We Expect When We Pray in Faith? (Faithfulness)

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) God may render the healing requested. 2) If God does not render the healing requested, He will provide discernment (Romans 12:2) and peace (Philippians 4:7). |
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James 5:16 also helps us understand the distinction between the prayer the endowed elders offered up and the prayers we may offer up when we confess our sins. Verse 16 uses the word "may" where as verse 15 uses the word "will". Again, this indicates that the prayers offered up by a faithful believer "may" result in healing by God whereas the prayers offered up by an elder who had received miraculous power as the result of an Apostle laying their hands upon them certainly "would" result in their healing. This does not mean that God was showing favoritism to the elders or those they prayed for; the limited-time purpose of

miraculous healing by the hands of man was to confirm the preached Word not yet compiled and widely distributed as the New Testament. Once the Word was complete, the miracles and the generations that had them had passed away (1 Corinthians 13:8-10).

A Key Difference in James 5:15+16	
Vs. 15	Vs. 16
“will”	“may”
<p>Meaning: One or more elders had been given miraculous gifts by the laying on of hands of the Apostle “would” make the ill individual better by their prayer offered “in faith” (vs. 15) (faith meaning obedience to God and also by obeying the command to pray and anoint). The faithful believer who had not been given these gifts could pray and “may” receive healing. <u>Every Christian today falls into the latter category</u> as none of us have received miraculous gifts by the laying on hands by an Apostle.</p>	

Finally, in vs. 17+18 James uses Elijah as an example. Elijah was a chosen prophet of God, who once again had powers for the purpose of confirming the prophecies (preaching, not always foretelling) He preached. His powers could be used at will, just like the elders and others in the early church who had received miraculous power by the laying on hands by an Apostle. We are not to be compared to Elijah or the elders James is referring to; James instead is saying that just as Elijah was to use his power for this purpose, so could the early-church elders who had that power. James’ chief concern was that some elders may be neglecting to use the power when it was available to them for the purpose of confirming the Word preached. This was the opposite problem the Corinthian church had where people were overusing, or abusing their power (1 Corinthians chapters 11-13).

This power was precious, temporary, and useful, so as long it was “a prayer offered in faith” (vs. 15) (faith here meaning obedience), the gifts were to be used. We can also understand this verse in the context of when James speaks earlier in James 4:17, “If anyone then knows the good he ought to do and does not do it, then to him it is sin.” These elders had a job – preaching the Word – and a gift to confirm it by (healing and other miraculous signs). They were to use both “in faith” (in obedience) and not neglect the short opportunity by which these gifts would be available to the fledgling church.

There can be great meaning in gathering together the elders of a local church, anointing the ill individual who requests the prayer, and having the elders pray over them. This strengthens the leadership, the church, and ill individual spiritually and in unity. Regardless if divine healing happens, it is a prayer offered in faith, by faithful people, for the purpose of fulfilling a Kingdom purpose (Romans 8:28). God will hear our prayer (1 John 5:14), and will either honor our request with healing or give us discernment (Romans 12:2) and peace (Philippians 4:7).

TWO OTHER BIBLICAL KINDS OF DIVINE HEALING

The previous section might have seemed formulaic; this section might seem speculative. Indeed, this author does speculate some below. With this admittance in mind, the following may be useful to the student to consider God’s whole counsel in this area of divine healing:

1) Communion could be an opportunity for divine healing but definitely carries with it the understanding of judgment if participated in flippantly or in neglect.

2) Divine healing sometimes occurs without a specific request.

Let us explore the first possibility:

Communion is many things Scripturally-speaking:

- 1) It is a memorial. (Luke 22:19-20)
- 2) It is a witness to the world. (1 Corinthians 11:26)
- 3) It is a communion (with God and fellow believers). (1 Corinthians 11:33)
- 4) It is a time of self-examination. (1 Corinthians 11:28)
- 5) It is a divine, weekly appointment with our Lord. (Luke 22:16; Acts 20:7)
- 6) It can render judgment – even physical ailment and death. (1 Corinthians 11:28-30)
- 7) It can render blessing. (1 Corinthians 10:16-18)

For the focus of our study, we will focus on points #3, #6, and #7, referencing the others as they became relevant to our study on divine healing.

Paul's treatise in 1 Corinthians 10+11 is our basis for potentially understanding communion's role in divine healing (the reader is greatly encouraged to read both chapters for a full, contextual treatment of the subject):

Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:16-18: ¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for

we all share the one loaf. ¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?”

In the KJV and some other translations, “participation” is rendered “communion”, where we get that term for the Lord’s Supper. “Communion” or “participation” indicates that although the Lord’s Supper is a memorial, it is also more than that:

To understand this passage and its potential effects, we must understand it in light of Paul’s reference to “the people of Israel” who ate the sacrifices of the altar.

1) Deuteronomy 18:1 indicates that the Levites ate some of the sacrifices offered to the Lord because they did not inherit land (they could not grow food, so they relied on the food and other resources tithed to them and provided for sacrifice – Numbers 18:21).

2) The Levites were the priestly tribe. No other tribe could serve the Old Testament tabernacle or temple (Deuteronomy 18:1; Hebrews 7:14). Any person not a Levite who tried to usurp the priesthood was overthrown (Korah’s rebellion – Numbers 16:1 ff; Saul’s sacrifice offered in vain – 1 Samuel 13:1 ff).

3) We, as Christians, are the priests of the New Covenant (1 Peter 2:5).

We can obviously surmise the priests ate the sacrifices not just to obey God, but obviously for their own nourishment and sustainment. They could not have survived unless they would have eaten the sacrifices, for they had no other way to obtain meat or grow food. This was by divine design and commandment.

All the same, our communion with Christ in communion is not just obeying a command of God, but an actual participation with the nourishment of Christ's body and blood sacrifice. It heals us spiritually; Paul indicates it also has physical effects (1 Corinthians 11:29-30).

Communion heals us spiritually by bringing us in contact with the saving benefits of Christ's body and blood just as baptism does at our time of salvation (Acts 2:38, 22:16; Galatians 3:27; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). Baptism happens once; communion happens every week (Acts 20:7). Would it not make sense that the very things that bring us into contact with the body and blood of Christ are the very things Satan confuses among believers today?

Christ keeps a divine appointment with us weekly (Luke 22:16). If we miss that appointment, we cheat ourselves of the nourishment provided (1 Corinthians 10:18). This malnourishment (missing communion) or "spiritual food-poisoning" by not taking communion after self-examination (otherwise, "flippantly") has stated negative physical effects (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). It follows that if the neglect of communion means spiritual malnourishment, and taking it flippantly has ill physical effects, that the communion we experience with him when the Lord's Supper is observed as Christ and His Apostles commanded, and the early church practices (Acts 2:42, 20:7) provides nourishment (1 Corinthians 10:16-18) as well. It stands to reason that if communion has the ability to render negative physical effects, it can also render positive effects for the believer.

Again, God has no obligation to heal. Taking communion as Scripture dictates, praying as Jesus and His Apostles instructed and living faithfully carries no guarantee of divine healing.

Nonetheless, all of the above Scripturally contributes (James 5:16) to God's hearing our repeated, specific, requests and acting on them. It is this author's belief that even if God answers a prayer "no", to the faithful person He will provide a much more clear reason (Romans 12:2) and peace (Philippians 4:7) than to the flippant, apathetic believer, or to the skeptic. We must realize above all that this mortal earth and its temporary inhabitants all exist to serve His purposes (Romans 8:28). If our requests fit into those purposes – or could fit in – then our ardent, faithful requests may very well receive a special blessing of God. If our request meets His purposes, He may send divine healing as a blessing and encouragement as well.

This leads us to our last discussion of this brief treatment of this immense topic: God sometimes heals (or otherwise acts) without any request.

God's plans have never been foiled by anyone or anything (Deuteronomy 7:9). There have been many periods of both Bible and recent history where there were simply no or few godly people. During these "spiritual droughts" God would still providentially work in the world to keep His promises to us.

This is because even when we are faithless, He is faithful (2 Timothy 3:16). From the beginning of time, when God promised to send a Messiah to defeat Satan and save us from our sins (Genesis 3:15), He did just that, sending Jesus (John 3:16). The most important divine healing is not our physical flesh, but our spiritual state healed by Him (Romans 5:8).

Let us resolve that although there are times we sincerely need physical healing, want physical healing, are faithful, are praying according

to Scripture, are participating in His ordinances as He commanded, believe in Him and His power, that we always remember that our reward is not ultimately here on earth. We do not have hope for what we already have, but for what we do not have (Romans 8:25). What we do not have yet is our inheritance in heaven, but we do have the absolutely-solid, bought-in-blood promise of it (1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23; Hebrews 11:39-40).

Key Fact:
The most important divine healing is not our physical flesh, but our spiritual state healed by Him (Romans 5:8).

All the same, this study is offered in sincerity that it encourages the reader to have faith in God, practice faithfulness unto His Son, foster a desire to obey Him, earnestly seek Him, find Him, and experience what He has planned for your life. You are invited to approach the throne of grace with confidence (Hebrews 4:16). Do so!

In summary:

- 1) Sometimes, we do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2).
- 2) Prayer means “ask”. A prayer is not a prayer unless we ask.
- 3) Remember to pray (“ask”) regularly (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- 4) Pray consistently (Luke 18:1ff)
- 5) Pray in faith (James 1:6)
- 6) Pray in faithfulness (James 5:16)
- 7) Pray unto the hope of God (Psalm 31:24, Isaiah 40:31)

Finally, remember, God is good, the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). He wishes to bless you according to His purposes (1 John 5:14).

May God bless the study of His Word on all subjects relevant to faith and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16).