

EFFECTIVE PRAYER: FOR THE SICK—PART THREE
James 5:14-16a

"Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health; if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

INTRODUCTION

Don Schulze, a Viet Nam veteran, lived a wild life until he and his wife were captured by Christ the same day, January 29, 1976, when Don was 25. God gave them stable years while their faith and knowledge of His Word grew. He then called them to abandon themselves to full-time service to, "Tell people about My Son." *A Life of Miracles: What One Ordinary Family Gained When They Gave up Everything to Follow God* captures their story. They had to be faithful through many discouraging encounters with people with little to no interest in embracing Christ. They also had to endure many rough financial spots and learn to rejoice over far less than when Don held a good-paying regular job. But they also experienced Christ's miraculous presence in unusual ways in communities around the United States, in Thailand, Rwanda, and Uganda.

One hot afternoon in 1983, while visiting homes in the neighborhood near their current church in Rialto, CA, Don knocked on the door of a neat ranch-style home. He introduced himself to Mindy, a woman who appeared to be in her 50s with a pronounced Texas drawl. She invited him inside. "It's hot out there," she said. "I'd offer you water, but it's hard for me to make it out into the kitchen. I have so much pain in my back that I can hardly move. I can't sleep at night without heavy medication. I can't sit in any one position for more than a few moments. I can't clean my house. I can't take care of my husband. . . ." Mindy then began to weep. After a few moments, she told Don her 14-year-old granddaughter had come to stay with her to help keep up their home. Don learned her back problems began with a major car accident. Despite surgery, therapy, and medication, her pain had persisted until about a year ago, when she started to improve. But she then slipped on some dry beans in a grocery store and landed flat on her back, which left her worse than ever.

Mindy professed she became a born-again Christian while a young girl and once walked closely with the Lord. But she'd given up on God and church years earlier, believing God had pretty much given up on her due to seemingly ignoring her prayers for healing and relief. Don called upon Mindy again the next day, accompanied by Bobbie, a woman friend from church. Don had just read **Luke 13:10-13** (NIV): "On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, He called her forward and said to her, 'Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.' ¹³ Then He put His hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God." When Don closed his Bible, he began to pray for Mindy and believed God spoke to his heart, "If you will pray for her, I will heal her." Bobbie told Don she'd experienced "something like a vision" while jogging in which the face of an older woman she didn't know had appeared, with the writing "Matthew 18:34-35" beneath her face. Don read **Matthew 18:34-35** (NASB): "'And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. ³⁵ My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart.'" Don believed **Jesus** warned us that if we refuse to forgive the sins of anyone else, after having received God's forgiveness, we could be turned over to torment of some kind.

When Don and Bobbie cautiously shared all this with Mindy, she cried out, "My God, my God. It's my mother." Her mother had always favored Mindy's older sister. When her mom grew old and infirm, needing care, Mindy faithfully "nursed" her while her sister made excuses of being "too busy." Yet, Mindy heard nothing but "how wonderful" her sister was and how pathetic she was. "Do you know what it's like to be rejected like that?" Mindy asked. "She never loved me." This is why Mindy found it impossible to forgive

her. Yet, she now agreed to forgive her mother out of obedience to God, despite her hardness. When Mindy began to pray, she began to cry, which led to deeper prayer and deeper tears. Christ's peaceful presence then enveloped her at the end of her prayer. Bobbie and Don laid hands upon her, asking God to fulfill His promise of healing her back. By faith, Mindy then began to bend over and touch her toes; being quite surprised to discover she could straighten up without pain. After repeatedly bending, "She began twirling around the living room like a ballerina," to the tears of joy of her granddaughter, who'd returned from school to this shocking miracle of healing. Mindy's back remained restored and pain free from that day forward (117-23).

Illness and death may challenge our faith in many ways. Who has not cried out longingly for God's miraculous healing of someone dear to us? We need to understand what James meant in today's text [reread]. James encouraged God-honoring boldness; to believe no bodily ailment is beyond God's power to cure! But James earlier taught us that praying in faith is a commitment to the will of God that trusts the character of God, despite current suffering (**James 1:2-8; 4:1-8; 4:13-16; 5:11**). It's magic or superstition to believe we can gain ability to direct supernatural power to do our bidding or that any human being has such power. The Pope, for one, has no power to heal just because he's the Pope, despite what some believe. In 1984, a columnist reported a humorous incident at a hospital where everyone awaited a visit from Pope John Paul II. A doctor who wanted to catch a glimpse of the Pope took a seat in a vacant wheelchair near the main entrance and busied himself with his notes. The Pope swept in and quickly blessed this doctor, whom he believed to be an invalid. The doctor immediately stood up and walked forward. The devout in the Pope's entourage then crossed themselves and rolled their eyes upward, in praise to God.

I would place more faith in the Apostle Paul's faith to gain miraculous healing, than any Pope or mega church pastor. Yet, Paul tells us in **II Timothy 4:20**, "I left Trophimus sick in Miletus" (a small town near Ephesus). Paul also had a recurrent physical affliction causing him grief. **II Corinthians 12:7-9** (NLT), "I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud. ⁸Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away. ⁹Each time He said, 'My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.'" In other words, God's hidden purposes may be gained by our affliction. Somewhere we must find a balance between never *expecting* the Lord to heal us, which James discourages, and *requiring* God to heal the sick on demand, which James also discourages.

III. ANOINTING WITH OIL (James 5:14-15a)

"Is anyone among you sick? He should call for the elders of the church, and they should pray over him after anointing him with olive oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick person, and the Lord will restore him to health." Here are two points to keep in mind about these words.

A. All Healing Is God's Healing

We can understand Paul's reference to Luke's profession as "the beloved physician" (**Colossians 4:14**, NASB), only if he and others benefitted from Luke's medical care. Paul counted it a blessing from God to have Luke as his frequent traveling companion. We should view the astounding medical advances of the past 200 years as what God has made possible. For example, powder made from willow tree leaves has given relief from headaches since the time of Hippocrates (460-377 B. C.). In 1829, scientists discovered it's the compound called salicin in willow plants that is the source of such pain relief, which is now found in common aspirin tablets. Who created willow plants and salicin and allowed technology to isolate it in the form of salicylic acid and provide it in a buffered form easy on our stomachs? "Every good thing given and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights" (**James 1:17**, NASB).

B. An Option Not an Order

When we are faced with health issues beyond the ability of modern medicine to cure or relieve, it's then we can seek direct healing from God rather than indirectly through general remedies He has made possible.

Yet, we miss the point if we think James specified the only way to seek divine healing is to be anointed with oil by the leadership of our church. There's no record **Jesus**, Peter, or Paul ever sought healing by this means. But if we struggle with our faith, having church "elders" invoke "the name of the Lord" over us while "anointing" us with "olive oil," which symbolizes being touched by the Holy Spirit, could greatly encourage us to believe normally impossible healing could be possible. A nursing supervisor at an Ohio hospital locked herself in her office to pray over the extremely low platelet count of her new granddaughter (which can lead to spontaneous bleeding). God answered her prayer for someone to pray for this baby by a pastor friend she saw walking toward the hospital entrance. He said he'd be glad to pray for this newborn but he'd not brought any oil with him (which he customarily used as his prayer aid). He improvised by asking if any KY jelly was on hand. He was handed a packet in the nursery, lightly touched the baby's head, anointed her with KY jelly, and prayed. By the next day, lab reports detected a dramatic increase in the platelet count and a completely normal count the day after. Her doctors had no medical explanation!

IV. FORGIVENSSES OF SIN (James 5:15a-16a)

"[I]f he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." **Jesus'** disciples asked whose sin was responsible for a man being born blind. Many then commonly believed illness to be a sign of God's judgment. **Jesus** dismissed this notion. "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered. "This came about so that God's works might be displayed in him" (**John 9:1-3**). Yet, though we're often ill through no fault of our own, God may use illness to judge our sin and motivate us to confess and forsake it. **Jesus** healed a man who'd been lame for 38 years. **Jesus** then warned, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (**John 5:14**, NIV). Confession to those we sin against, or to our church leaders if our sin disrupts the unity or health of our church family, may be a condition of God's healing. We may even need to forgive ourselves before we can receive God's healing of our bodies as He has healed our souls.

CONCLUSION

While Don Schulze served as a pastor in Uganda's capital of Kampala, in 1995, he met John. After John coughed saliva all over Don and an assistant pastor in a prayer line, Don learned John was dying of AIDS. At that time, 2 million of Uganda's 19 million people were HIV positive. Entire villages had become ghost towns. Three weeks later, Don was summoned to John's home. He appeared to be in the last hours of his life; too weak to do more than nod. Don desperately prayed for wisdom how to pray and care for him. He was led to assure John of God's love and to read three Scripture passages to him that affirmed the vastness of God's forgiveness. They included **Isaiah 43:25** (NKJV): "I, *even I, am* He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins"; and **Isaiah 38:17** (NKJV): "Indeed *it was for my own peace that I had great bitterness; but You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.*" Don then told John, "I don't want to presume what God is doing, but it seems to me there is a clear message here. Whatever you have done in the past was forgiven when you put your faith in Jesus. God has forgotten all about it." John nodded weakly and smiled, and then fell asleep. Don then prayed for God to bless and comfort John and left.

The following Sunday, John shocked everyone by attending church! After the service, he told Don he'd believed AIDS was his "just punishment" for the atrocities he committed as a military commander in the 1980s during a time of civil war in Uganda. He'd led gang rapes and murdered children and adults of families who supported President Milton Obote, to retaliate for the terrible cruelties Obote's forces committed against innocent villagers. Though he believed God had forgiven him in a general way after he committed his life in repentance to **Jesus**, he believed some of his sins were so great he "still had to pay" for them. His first wife infected him with AIDS, and he'd unknowingly infected his second wife and his children.

After Don first visited him, John "had a dream, or a vision" of "standing in a great room with blood" up to his knees. His first wife taunted him with "an evil smile on her face" saying, "John, today you will be with

me." But "something like a bolt of lightning" "struck" and "disintegrated" her, followed by a "great flash of light." John then looked down and the pool of blood in which he'd stood had been transformed into "crystal-clear water." He awoke in the morning feeling good enough to go outside with a sheet around him to see the sun. His neighbors were so certain he must have died that they fled screaming from what they believed to be his ghost. His appetite and strength quickly returned. Blood tests confirmed that not only he had become HIV negative, but also his second wife and their children. John soon regained his position in the Presidential Guard. Skeptics kept waiting for his AIDS symptoms to reoccur, but when Don and his wife left Uganda three years later, John remained AIDS free and continued to tell everyone what God's love had done for him (xi-xvii)!