

SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT PRAYER AND DIVINE HEALING

Danny Sherman PLSAL.ORG

I have seen that people with serious illnesses respond in different ways to the stark reality they are facing. Some give a lot of money to someone who promises them a miracle. Others make pilgrimages to religious sites. Some travel to other countries desperately seeking an experimental cure. Others become bitter and blame God. Unfortunately, some fall into depression and even commit suicide. Some experience divine healing. Others die, but with the full joy of entering God's presence.

HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND TO ILLNESS? WHAT DOES **GOD'S WORD** SAY?

James 5:13-16 teaches that when someone becomes ill, they should call the elders of the church to come and pray for them and anoint them with oil. The passage includes the idea that, in some cases, repentance may be necessary. That means there are situations in which the illness is directly related to some sin (Exodus 15:26; Deuteronomy 28:60; Acts 12:20-23), and repentance (Proverbs 28:13) must occur in order to experience physical healing. Even Jesus, in John 5:14, instructed the man who had been paralyzed: "Look, you have been healed. Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you."

But is sin always involved when there is an illness? Certainly not! Epaphroditus was faithfully serving in ministry with Paul when he fell sick (Philippians 2:25-30). Jesus affirmed, in the case of the man born blind, that his condition was not the consequence of sin but part of God's wonderful plan (John 9:1-3).

Some have argued that praying "if it is Your will" is not correct because James 5:14-15 simply says we should pray for the sick person's healing. It mentions nothing about "if it is Your will." They think we should pray with faith and confidence (Matthew 21:22). Others point to the preceding passage in James 4:13-17, which clearly says we should not presume, overlooking God's will in the matter. They teach that we must submit to God and accept His will rather than demand that He obey our whims. Also consider 1 John 5:14-15, which emphasizes the importance of praying according to God's will. Is it possible to combine these two concepts into one?

Is it always God's will to heal the sick? Apparently not. Timothy needed a little wine for his stomach ailments (1 Timothy 5:23). Paul had to leave Trophimus behind during his journey because he was ill (2 Timothy 4:20).

The context does not indicate that Paul lacked sufficient faith to heal him, nor that Trophimus lacked the faith needed to receive divine healing.

Can God heal today? Absolutely! He is the Almighty God (Genesis 18:14). It is a mistake to put God into a theological box made by humans. This does not mean modern medicine has no value. God can use a doctor, a surgeon, or medication to help restore our physical health.

When God heals, we should praise Him with a heart full of gratitude. We should encourage the healed person to continue walking daily with God. When God does not heal, we should still praise Him with a grateful heart. We should comfort the sick person and, if they are terminal, help them prepare joyfully to depart and be with the Lord (Philippians 1:21).