

## Focus on James 5:13–20

### WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” E. Elizabeth Johnson

James writes, “The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up” (5:15a). This “prayer of faith” is faithful prayer, prayer that trusts God to answer the petition. Modern people sometimes look askance at such apparently naive confidence in so-called “faith healing.” That stems from a distinctly modern understanding of illness, though, one that presumes scientific analysis alone is able to assess a person’s state of health. James says that anointing, prayer, and the laying on of hands “will restore the weary” (my trans.), which is substantially more than merely prescribing antibiotics can do.

### WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Mark Douglas

Prayer for James is not a private matter. Instead, it helps to shape a particular kind of community in which people are committed to each other. The sick call for elders to pray over them. Sinners confess to one another. The cheerful sing. For James, the community that prays together stays together—which is no small feat when there are so many things that can divide a community, many of which he has addressed throughout the book.

### SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Kathy L. Dawson

The prayers of the community shape the congregation and allow the people to become more nearly the body of Christ. In churches I have attended, it is not unusual for prayer times to last from twenty to thirty minutes, when individual members of the congregation voice their prayers of supplication in worship. I am grateful and excited to hear how God is working and to know how to pray for others. In communal prayer we have the opportunity to listen for and be God’s voice in the world. Through prayer the congregation is empowered to carry out Christ’s mission. It is a practice in which all ages can participate. Prayer changes relationships and lives. It should be our first practice as a congregation, if we are truly to walk in James’s concept of godly wisdom.

### NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,”

Barbara Brown Taylor

We can connect the health of our congregations with concrete, communal acts of faith, beginning with things that are already taking place. Even if the list is short, we may not have thought of the ways in which something as routine as a Wednesday night supper offers chances to pray with the suffering and sing songs of praise with the cheerful. Does someone routinely take plates from such suppers to those who are too sick to attend? Why not send an elder or two along for the ride? Whether or not they take oil, the point is for the community to go in search of those at risk of being lost to it. The point is to go to them when they cannot or will not come to you.