

Although anointing with oil seems strange to many modern Christians, it was a practice of the earliest churches. But where did the ceremony come from and why did the early Christians do it? What would be the benefits of such a practice today? A quick survey of Bible references to anointing with oil helps one begin to answer such questions. Consider the following:

- The first recorded anointing in Scripture was done by Jacob.
Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. He called that place Bethel (Genesis 28:18-19).
- When the Tabernacle was constructed everything was anointed with oil.
Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it; consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy (Exodus 40:9).
- Certain Israelite offerings were to be mixed with oil.
When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it,... (Leviticus 2:1).
- When a diseased person was healed, anointing was part of the ceremonial cleansing.
The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on the top of the blood of the guilt offering. The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed and make atonement for him before the LORD (Leviticus 14:17-18).
- Oil was used in the appointment of those recognized as prophet, priest, or king.
How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes (Psalm 133:1-2).

Jesus came as prophet, priest, **and** king. His official title was Messiah or Christ, which means "The Anointed One." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (Hebrews 1:8-9).

- All Israel are called God's "anointed ones"
He allowed no one to oppress them [Israel]; for their sake he rebuked kings: "Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm" (Psalm 105:15).

"Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Corinthians 1:21-22).

- In New Testament times, anointing was an act of courtesy for guests entering a house. *“You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet” (Luke 7:46).*
- Oil was used both internally and externally as medicine. Internally it was a remedy for gastric disorders and externally it was applied to cuts and bruises. *He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine (Luke 10:34).*
- Oil and healing are connected at least twice in the New Testament. The oil appears to not be medicinal but rather symbolic. *They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them (Mark 6:13).*

Is any one of 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 (James 5:14).

It appears that throughout Scripture the primary function of anointing with oil is to symbolize dedication and consecration to the Lord. Consecration means to set apart as holy. Some have understood the oil mentioned in James 5:14 to be medicinal. However, the sick person does not call the elders of the church because they are physicians, but because they are men of faith! The oil then would be symbolic of one's devotion, one's trust, and one's dependence on God. In a word, **the reason one asks for an anointing is because of one's faith.** If this is the case, then anointing with oil has great relevance for us today. We need to follow the instructions that James has given us.

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. 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. And the prayer offered in faith will make them well: the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. 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 (James 5:13-16).

James lists three situations people experience in life and gives the appropriate faith response. If one is in trouble, they should put their trust in the Lord by expressing their concerns to him in prayer. If one is happy, they should express their faith by thanking and praising God in song. If one is physically sick, they should express their faith by calling for the elders to anoint and pray over them. This does not mean that one should not go to the doctor or take medicine. Paul told his friend Timothy to drink wine as medicine for stomach trouble (1 Timothy 5:23). James is not saying anything pro or con about medical treatments. His concern is faith! He wants people to put their trust in the Lord no matter what situation they are in.

James is specifically concerned with illnesses that are caused by personal sin. Thus, he mentions the assurance of forgiveness (5:15) and the fact that confession of sin enables one

to be healed (5:16). Not every illness is caused by sin, of course, but the connection between sickness and sin may be greater than you think. There has long been a link between tobacco use and cancer. Alcohol and drug abuse can cause all kinds of injuries and physical problems. Sexually transmitted diseases are just one of the problems that may result from sexual immorality. But illness can also be linked to worry, anxiety, hatred, rage, bitterness, and jealousy. These can cause all kinds of physical, emotional, and mental problems.

Sickness is often a wake up call for people to get serious about the sin in their lives. Therefore, before anointing with oil it is appropriate for one to confess any sins in their life as a statement of repentance. With that said, anointing is not just for sicknesses caused by sin. Notice James writes, “if you have sinned” (5:15). Anointing is appropriate any time you are seriously ill and want to express your faith and trust in God.

God has wondrously created us as creatures who can experience the world around us through five senses. As we express our faith in God, He has graciously provided ways that our senses can be involved as well. Thus when one is baptized, water envelopes one’s whole body. When we take the Lord’s Supper, we can taste the bread and the wine. Oil is another such blessing from the Lord. When applied as an anointing, one can not only **hear** the prayer being offered but **feel** the prayer and perhaps even **smell** the spices in the oil.

It is a well established fact that not everyone who receives prayer is physically healed. James isn’t saying they will be. This is the third instruction on prayer in this letter. The first mention of prayer is for those suffering all kinds of trials (James 1:5-8). James says they should pray for wisdom. God is generous and giving and the person needs to pray trusting that God will give what is needed to endure the trial. Therefore, the first lesson in prayer is to **pray putting one’s complete trust in God.**

The second mention of prayer is to those having relationship troubles (James 4:1-3). They also need to ask in faith trusting that God will supply what they need. Their asking in faith will put a stop to fighting and quarreling to get what they demand. Thus, the second lesson in prayer is to **pray putting God’s will above my own.**

These two prayer lessons provide the foundation for the promise given in James 5:15, *And the prayer offered in faith will make them well; the Lord will raise them up.* This is not an unconditional promise. Anointing does not manipulate God. The prayer of faith believes God can heal if he chooses. And, the prayer of faith submits to whatever God chooses. Therefore, the third lesson in prayer is that **faith in God is what brings the healing.**

Healing is not the product of the anointing oil – that is just a symbol. Healing does not come from the elders – they are just men of faith. God is the one who heals. And God any way He chooses.

- He may use medicine.
- He may use the natural processes of the body.



Anointing with Oil

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- He may use supernatural means.
- He may heal quickly or slowly.

However, He chooses to heal, healing is His alone to provide.

Asking to be anointed with oil is a way of expressing one's faith in God. The oil is not magic but it is beneficial. It allows you to feel the presence of the Lord. It is a physical demonstration of your devotion to God. It is a reminder that you are one of God's "anointed ones."