

A Humbled Leper

FOCUS THOUGHT

God delivers those who humble themselves.

»» FOCUS VERSES

II Kings 5:13–14

And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

»» LESSON TEXT

II Kings 5:9–14

9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.

10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.

11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.

12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.

13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?

14 Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

A HUMBLE PRISON PRAYER

In December of 1999, while in the Mississippi State Penitentiary in Parchman, Ron repented of his sins and was filled with the Holy Ghost.

Over time he took correspondence Bible school courses to become a minister, and he studied some law to try and get his conviction overturned. He had a stellar reputation inside the prison and earned the trust of the warden and guards. He was known for his ministry and the quality work he did all over the prison campus. Ron had family, friends, pastors, and business owners write letters to the governor. He did everything in his power to gain his release. In all of that, every door closed. Ron exhausted himself trying to find a way to be released, but nothing worked.

After eighteen years Ron finally realized that even though he was doing his best to live a life of integrity and obey the Word of God, pride still had a foothold. It took time and was one of the hardest things he had ever done, but he was finally able to pray, “God, I am guilty of my crimes, and I deserve to be here. Lord, I want You to decide what is best for me. If You decide it is best for me to stay in prison for the rest of my life, then I am OK with that.”

After that humble prayer, everything began to change. Over the next two years, doors began to open, and events happened that were unheard of in Parchman. All of this led to his miraculous release, at his first parole hearing.

Genuine humility touches the heart of God, allows our hearts to connect to His, and provides the opportunity for the miraculous.

▶▶▶ OUTLINE

I. NAAMAN

- A. A Commander of the Army Who Had Leprosy
- B. Diseases of the Body and Soul Touch All Types of People

II. A SERVANT GIRL FROM ISRAEL

- A. A Prophet Who Could Heal Him
- B. We Must Testify to Others about God’s Power

III. WASH IN THE JORDAN

- A. Naaman Was Offended and Went Away Angry
- B. His Servants Convinced Him to Obey the Prophet
- C. We Must Listen to Those Who Encourage Us to Do the Right Thing

IV. NAAMAN HUMBLING HIMSELF

- A. He Was Made Clean
- B. He Testified That the Lord Is God
- C. God Delivers Those Who Humble Themselves

▶▶▶ CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

The entire narrative of Naaman highlights the role of servants. The story begins with Naaman, a servant of the king of Syria, being saved from his horrific diagnosis by a servant girl. His anger almost talked him out of a miracle, but his servants talked him into listening to the prophet. After his healing Naaman returned to Elisha and in humility identified himself as Elisha’s servant. The narrative comes to an end as one of Elisha’s servants was cursed with the disease of Naaman because of his greediness. Humbling ourselves is one of the hardest things to do. Becoming a servant of God will call us to interact with a diverse faith community. Being a servant of God will also call us to be vulnerable in this community. Admitting we have areas in our lives where we need help can be hard, but that admission allows the rest of the faith community to step up and provide care.

I. NAAMAN

A. A Commander of the Army Who Had Leprosy

Naaman was a Syrian military hero, and during this period of Israel's history, the Syrians were the greatest military threat to Israel. (See I Kings 20; 22; II Kings 6–7.) Naaman was the commander of the army of the king of Syria. It was through his many battles, probably including those against Israel, that he received praise. In this narrative the fame and valor of Naaman was referred to four times to emphasize his distinction: he was the captain of the host, he was a great man before his master, he was of high renown because of the victories he had won, and he was a mighty man of valor (August H. Konkel, *NIV Application Commentary*). However, with all this praise, the author closed out with an anticlimactic “but he was a leper.” Most people would think Naaman had the ideal life. However, he found himself excluded from the “ideal life” because of his leprosy. While it is easy to look at someone else and wish for that life—because it seems that person has no problems—we do not know the struggles that person faces. Eventually we all come to understand that life is not perfect.

» *Have you ever struggled with envy? If so, how have you worked on overcoming this struggle?*

B. Diseases of the Body and Soul Touch All Types of People

Dr. Chris Thurman found that one of the lies Christians believe is “because I am a Christian, God will protect me from pain and suffering” (*The Lies We Believe*). Somewhere in our theology, the church has mistaken Christianity to mean a life free from pain, loss, hurt, and suffering. However, the church must understand that being a Christian does not mean life will be free from issues that face non-believers. If the church is not careful, unrealistic faith in God can turn into a source of bitterness and resentment when life begins to turn bad. A Christian's ultimate hope is not that everything will go fine here on Earth, but we have an eternal hope awaiting us in Heaven. Even Jesus Christ, who should have been free from all pain and hurt, was not sheltered from struggles while He walked here on Earth. The church must accept that exemption from hurt and pain does not come with the Christian walk.

The story of Naaman brings into focus hardships for both Jew and non-Jew. The disease-stricken Naaman caused hurt and pain for the Jewish servant girl when he dragged her from her homeland. And even though Naaman received his physical healing, there is no mention of the servant girl ever receiving her freedom.

II. A SERVANT GIRL FROM ISRAEL

A. A Prophet Who Could Heal Him

A young Jewish girl, having heard the horrific stories of Syria invading her own nation of Israel, was forced to become a servant of the leader of those invading

armies. While Scripture does not give us many details about her, we do see that she waited upon Naaman's wife. According to this young girl's upbringing, she was enslaved by a ritually unclean or defiled man (Leviticus 13–14), and he was under the judgment of God (II Kings 15:5; Numbers 12:1–15; II Samuel 3:28–29).

While this young girl was living a life she had never dreamed of living—inside she must have hoped that one day she would be restored to her family and people—she heard about a need within the house. Immediately she thought about the great prophet in Israel, Elisha. The prophet's reputation was widespread because of all God had done through him. He had parted the waters of Jordan (II Kings 2:14), healed the bitter waters (II Kings 2:21), called down the she bears on those who mocked him (II Kings 2:24), filled the valley with water (II Kings 3:17), deceived the Moabites into believing the water was blood (II Kings 3:22), performed the miracle of the vessels of oil (II Kings 4:4), prophesied that the Shunammite woman would have a son (II Kings 4:16), resurrected that Shunammite's son (II Kings 4:34), healed the gourds (II Kings 4:40–41), and performed the miracle of bread (II Kings 4:43). All these miracles were evidence of God's power, and this servant girl believed this same miracle power could work on Naaman. So she shared with Naaman's concerned wife about the prophet in Israel who could heal Naaman.

» *Why is it important to witness to others even while we are going through hard times?*

B. We Must Testify to Others about God's Power

The young servant girl was used to living in harsh environments. Her homeland was no longer a nation under God; the king of Israel had turned to Baal worship. Thus, coming under a household that did not worship the true God, was not necessarily something new. Still she did not let that become a hinderance to her lifestyle and witness.

God has always been a loving God. Naaman eventually learned this himself. The narrative of Naaman displays God's purpose originally spoken to Abraham: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). No matter what situation we find ourselves in, Christians are supposed to be a blessing to all who inhabit the Earth. No gender, ethnic, or social prohibition was placed on this promise. The author emphasized that all would be blessed. We cannot be part of the church if we think we can pick and choose to whom we will be a blessing. God's Word does not place limitations on whom He can touch.

The servant was willing to put her life on the line by telling her master that their gods were not the answer and the prophet in Israel was better and could bring the answer to Naaman's situation. She was not a well-known person of influence, yet she witnessed to Naaman. No matter who we are, our testimony to one individual could change the dynamics of revival around the world.

One amazing part of this narrative is that this girl witnessed to Naaman's wife. She did not witness to the one who was sick, but she knew if she testified, God would do

the rest. The testimony was then shared with Naaman through his wife. The people we testify to may not be the ones who end up coming to our church. God is faithful to use the testimony we share.

III. WASH IN THE JORDAN

A. Naaman Was Offended and Went Away Angry

Naaman arrived at Elisha's house with horses and a beautiful chariot. He was wearing some of the finest clothing in the whole world. Elisha's house must have looked insignificant as Naaman pulled up with his large caravan and riches. Naaman was a proud man and was used to receiving whatever he wanted. He was not familiar with defeat on the battlefield or being denied what he wanted. Even the king granted his wishes. But pride can become a snare if we are not careful. Proverbs warns us about pride (Proverbs 6:17; 11:2; 16:18; 29:23).

Naaman was quickly humbled out of his dignified state. Instead of meeting Naaman at the door, Elisha sent his messenger—most likely Gehazi—to speak with Naaman. Perhaps Elisha was worried Naaman was wanting a magical specialist to conduct a proper ritual that would bring healing to him. The church should not be filled with rituals or individuals seeking praise because of their works. The church should give all glory to Jesus Christ as the healer. We do not need a specific person to pray for us to see God move in our lives. I John 5:14–15 tells us those who believe and pray the will of God will have their prayers answered.

Disgusted at the thought of having to be baptized in the Jordan River, Naaman grumbled to himself about the rivers of Damascus being better than all the waters of Israel. He wondered, *Does it really matter where I get wet, as long as I get wet? Does not all water lead to the cleansing purpose? And does it really have to be that seven-step process? Really?* However, Naaman quickly learned that all waters do not lead to the same conclusion.

» *Why do you think Naaman became angry at Elisha's instructions?*

B. His Servants Convinced Him to Obey the Prophet

Naaman's frustration with the prophet came to a boil. Through his furious rage, he could have decided to gather his army and march on the man of God. As a great man, he was expecting something great to happen. However, he did not receive an audience from the prophet, and he was asked to go down into waters that were inferior to his standing.

Although the men with Naaman were his servants, they still cared about him. Their words were never disrespectful. They never said, "Finally, he gets what he deserves." Instead, they showed respect for him by using reason to convince him to obey the man of God. They knew Naaman would have been willing to do anything grand, most likely because he could turn it into a grand show. But they also recognized

the simplicity of the faith that was needed. All he had to do was follow the simple instructions of the prophet. Sometimes salvation can seem like a major process; however, the hardest part is humbling ourselves before the Lord.

» *Why is it important to be surrounded by people who encourage us?*

C. We Must Listen to Those Who Encourage Us to Do the Right Thing

For some people today, Elisha would not make a good pastor. His actions could be viewed as rude, unloving, and arrogant. Church shopping has become a trend—seeking out a pastor who will please me the most and will fulfill my needs. And when Naaman got upset at the prophet, Elisha did not run after him. Elisha did not plead with him; he left Naaman in the hands of God. For us to truly succeed, we need a pastor who will speak to us as God has commanded. While the words of the preacher may seem harsh, it is important to reflect upon these words to see the change we need to facilitate. Through the way Elisha treated Naaman, Naaman found a pride issue in his life.

Naaman had to humble himself and hear the wisdom of his servants. He had to hear wisdom from those who were under him. Wisdom does not dwell only upon those who are well educated or those who seem to have it all together. God can use anyone. Naaman, the man who was used to humbling people, found wisdom from servants. Here the humbled showed they had more wisdom than the exalted.

IV. NAAMAN HUMBLLED HIMSELF

A. He Was Made Clean

Once Naaman understood the only price for his miracle was humility, he found himself coming out of the water clean. His healing was not a seven-month plan. His healing was instantaneous. Naaman was not only cleansed on the outside, but something happened internally. Internal change must happen before God is able to work. The biggest obstacle to God's will being accomplished is getting ourselves out of the way.

The cleansing of Naaman did not produce a partial healing. All the skin on his body was completely restored like that of a child. No spots or marks remained. He was given a brand-new start. When we are born again, we receive a new start. Yes, people can remind us of who we once were, but that is no longer who we are. People can remind us of our past, but we are now walking as new individuals.

B. He Testified That the Lord Is God

When he returned to see the prophet, Naaman's disposition had been transformed. His pride and arrogance had been overcome with humility, and an audience with Elisha was finally granted. This man who had conquered lands turned to the prophet and said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel" (II Kings 5:15). No other God can compare to the one who had granted his heart's

desire. Because of God's kindness to him, Naaman was ready to make Him his Lord. Naaman was humbled, and he changed his attitude toward the land of Israel. Earlier he had not wanted to bathe in the waters of Israel, now he was willing to take that part of the land back home with him. He planned to take two mule-loads of earth back home to create an altar to his new God (Exodus 20:24–25; II Kings 5:17). He recognized God as the only true God. And his testimony would be seen by anyone who would come into his household.

C. God Delivers Those Who Humble Themselves

As we referenced at the beginning of this lesson, Naaman's story highlights the role of servants and humility. While Naaman struggled with humility, Elisha remained humble. Even though Naaman pushed for the prophet to take a reward for the part he played, Elisha refused. Instead, Elisha wanted all glory to go to the one he served.

If you are seeking for a divine solution from God, start with humility. There needs to be a check of heart, spirit, soul, and mind. Is there any place in your life where pride dwells, thus prohibiting God from moving?

» *Are there areas in your life where you struggle with humility? Explain.*

▶▶ INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

While we talk about God humbling those who are not saved, the church also needs humility. We must be honest about our true motives. Naaman's narrative is filled with prideful and humbled individuals. God is able to work through people who humble themselves.

Two true servants were mentioned in this story, Elisha's servant (Gehazi) and the captured Jewish girl. Although she was experiencing hurt and pain, the unnamed Jewish girl wanted to help those she saw in need. There was no pride in sight. However, Gehazi, the man who was learning from one of the greatest prophets, allowed pride and greed to consume him.

Gold, silver, and fine clothing will not bring complete joy. Having a famous name people would revere will not bring joy. Material things may bring fleeting happiness, but true happiness can only be found in pursuing the will of God. And that takes humility.