

If Only: What Naaman's Story Teaches Us About Faith, Humility, and Healing

Second Kings chapter 5 tells the story of a powerful military commander, a captive servant girl, and a prophet whose simple instructions changed everything. It is a story about pride, faith, obedience, and the kind of healing only God can provide.

Who Was Naaman and Why Does His Story Matter?

Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. He was a great man, a valiant soldier, and highly regarded by his king. Scripture even notes that God worked through Him to bring victory to Aram, which is remarkable given that Naaman was not a believer at the time.

It is a reminder that God can work through whoever, whenever, and however He pleases.

But despite all of Naaman's greatness, he had leprosy. And there was nothing he could do about it. Leprosy was a slow, devastating, and deadly disease. It would eventually take over his entire body, and he would die a painful death, likely in isolation.

What Can a Slave Girl Teach Us About Living on Mission?

At some point, raiders from Aram had kidnapped a young Israelite girl who ended up serving in Naaman's household. She had every reason to be bitter, angry, and resentful. Her life had been torn apart.

But that is not where her heart was.

Instead of hatred, she had compassion. Instead of despair, she had faith. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy." (2 Kings 5:3, English Standard Version (ESV))

Those two words, "if only," carry an urgency and a burden to share what God can do. She was living life on mission, even in the middle of her own suffering.

Her example challenges each of us. When is the last time you said to someone, "If only you would come to church with me," or "If only I could tell you what God has done in my life"?

How God Uses Ordinary People in Extraordinary Ways

Because of this girl's testimony, word reached the two most powerful people in the land: the king of Aram and Naaman Himself. Her voice, the voice of a slave with no rights and no status, set in motion a chain of events that would change Naaman's life forever.

Do not underestimate how God might use you. Do not underestimate your testimony.

This is also a powerful example of how God uses the gifts of women to encourage, inspire, and bless others. Her faith and her willingness to speak up built something that has been read and studied for over 2,000 years.

Why Did the King of Israel Panic Instead of Trust God?

When Naaman arrived with a letter from the king of Aram asking for healing, the king of Israel tore his robes in fear. He assumed the worst. He was skeptical and afraid.

The contrast here is striking. A captive servant girl had more faith than the king appointed to lead God's people.

Fear and unbelief will always stand in the way of what God wants to do. That tension between faith and unbelief runs through this entire passage.

What Happens When God's Instructions Seem Too Simple?

The prophet Elisha sent word to Naaman with a straightforward instruction: go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River and you will be cleansed.

Naaman was furious. He expected Elisha to come out personally, pray over him, and perform something dramatic. Instead, he got a message delivered by a servant telling him to dip in a muddy river.

His response reveals the real problem: pride.

He thought he deserved better treatment. He was not willing to humble himself, especially in front of his entire entourage. And on top of that, he was too confident in his own thinking. He had already decided what healing should look like.

The question worth asking is this: are you more confident in your own opinions than in obeying God's commands?

Surrendering your life to Christ requires humility. Jesus told the Pharisees plainly that if they continued in their unbelief, they would die in their sins. Stubborn pride has eternal consequences.

Why We All Need People Who Will Speak Truth Into Our Lives

Naaman was on his way back to Syria in a rage when his servants approached him. They asked him a simple question: if the prophet had told you to do something great and difficult, would you not have done it? How much more then when he simply says, wash and be clean?

Their love for him was strong enough to challenge his thinking. And it changed everything.

We all need people in our lives who will do the same. People who love us enough to question our decisions, call us to accountability, and speak truth when we are heading in the wrong direction. That is exactly why Christian community matters so deeply.

What Does Naaman's Healing Have to Do With Baptism?

Naaman humbled himself. He went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, just as he had been told. And his flesh was restored, clean like that of a young boy.

The word used in the Greek Septuagint translation of this passage for "dipped" is the word baptizo, the same word used for baptism. He went down into the Jordan River, the same river where John the Baptist baptized for the repentance of sins, the same river where Jesus Himself was baptized.

This is not a coincidence. The early church recognized it. Irenaeus, a church Father from around 175 AD, wrote about this passage directly:

"It was not for nothing that Naaman of old, when suffering from leprosy, was purified upon His being baptized. But it served as an indication to us. For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord."

The physical healing and the spiritual cleansing point to the same truth. When we come to Christ through faith, we are restored and renewed. The Apostle Paul's own story reflects this. Ananias said to him, "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16, English Standard Version (ESV))

Saved by grace through faith, with sins washed away, symbolized in the waters of baptism. It all comes together in this story.

Two Takeaways From Naaman's Story

God Still Heals

God still hears our prayers. He is still in the business of healing people today. If you need healing, be willing to humble yourself and ask. Come and let others pray over you. There is no telling what God might do when we surrender to Him in humility.

Give Your Life to Jesus

The most important thing you can do is give your heart to Jesus. It requires the same thing it required of Naaman: humble obedience. Acknowledging that you need healing. Acknowledging that you need forgiveness. Calling upon His name.

Naaman came back to Elisha after his healing and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel." (2 Kings 5:15, English Standard Version (ESV))

That is the destination God wants to bring every one of us to.

Life Application

This week, take one step toward living life on mission the way the servant girl did. Think of one person in your life who needs to hear about what God has done for you. It does not have to be a long conversation or a perfectly crafted speech. It can be as simple as an invitation, a text, or a moment of honest sharing.

But it starts with humility. It starts with setting aside your pride and your fear and saying, "If only I could tell you about Jesus."

Ask yourself these questions as you reflect on this message:

- Is there an area of my life where pride is keeping me from obeying what God is asking me to do?
- Do I have people around me who love me enough to speak truth into my life, and am I willing to listen?
- Is there someone in my life right now who needs to hear about Jesus, and what is stopping me from saying something?
- Have I truly humbled myself before God and surrendered my life to Him, or am I still holding something back?