

Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family

Title: The Simple Path to Transformation

Lesson: 2 Kings 5:1-14

5 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.^[a]

2 Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents^[b] of silver, six thousand shekels^[c] of gold and ten sets of clothing. 6 The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

7 As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

8 When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." 9 So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. 10 Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

11 But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. 12 Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

13 Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Friends, just a couple of days ago, we celebrated the Fourth of July. I hope you all had a wonderful time. On that day, many of us reflect on freedom and independence, gathering with family to enjoy barbecues. The big city fireworks displays can be grand and dazzling, but the simple joy of watching fireworks in front of our homes with loved ones or at a small-town festival here in Wisconsin brings us just as much happiness, doesn't it?

When you think about it, the moments that truly change our lives often begin in such simple, unassuming places. The story of Naaman, the great commander we read about today, was like a dazzling Fourth of July firework. He won many battles, bringing great pride to the king of Aram. Aram was often at war with northern Israel, and Naaman's name struck fear into the hearts of the Israelites.

On the outside, Naaman seemed to have it all—power, honor, success. But even he had a problem that plagued his life: a skin disease, known in those days as leprosy, considered incurable. It wasn't severe yet, but it was spreading across his body, and that was his greatest fear.

(Slide 1) This might sound like a bit of a side note, but since it's cherry season here, I can't help but think about how delicious cherries are. In Korea, cherries are often imported from California. By the time they arrive by ship or plane, they've been treated to prevent going bad, so they always felt hard and lacked flavor. It wasn't until I came to the U.S. that I discovered how soft and sweet cherries could be. My family and I love them, and we've been eating a lot lately. But the other day, I found a cherry that looked a bit odd—it had a strange, stretched-out part, almost like an elephant's trunk. It looked so unusual that I hesitated to eat it.

Even after eating all the other cherries, I finally ate that odd one, but I couldn't help worrying—what if a bug crawled out of it? I don't know if everyone feels this way, but sometimes we hesitate to touch or eat something unusual, like that cherry. If we feel that way about a piece of fruit or an unfamiliar animal, it's no surprise that people would be wary of approaching someone with a skin disease.

Even though Naaman's condition wasn't contagious, that didn't matter to those around him. People knew he had this disease, and they hesitated to come near him, fearing it might spread. Naaman was all too aware of this, and he knew that if his condition worsened, he could face isolation from society. His skin disease was his greatest concern. In the face of it, all his power, honor, and success seemed meaningless.

At that time, Aram and Israel were at war, and their relationship was tense. During a recent small fight with Israel, Naaman had taken a young Israelite girl captive, who served his wife. This girl told Naaman's wife that a prophet in Israel could heal him.

Normally, Naaman might have dismissed the words of a servant girl, but his condition was worsening, and even the best medicine of his time couldn't cure it. In desperation, he went to his king and shared what the girl had said. The king of Aram, who valued Naaman greatly, sent him to Israel with a letter and lavish gifts, asking for his condition to be treated.

But to the Israelites, who feared both Aram and Naaman, this gesture didn't feel like kindness—it felt like a threat. They knew how much Aram valued Naaman, and the lavish gifts only heightened their anxiety. They worried that if they failed to heal him, Aram might use it as an excuse to attack. And how could Israel heal a disease that even Aram's best doctors couldn't cure? The Israelite king was stuck, overwhelmed with worry.

(Slide 2) But then, God's prophet Elisha heard the news and told the king to send Naaman to him. So Naaman, leading his entourage, arrived at Elisha's doorstep. Naaman expected Elisha to come out, perhaps lay hands on his afflicted skin and pray for healing. But nothing like that happened. Elisha didn't even appear. Instead, he sent a servant to tell Naaman to go to the Jordan River and wash himself seven times.

For a man of Naaman's status and power, this treatment must have felt rude, even insulting. He had come with a letter from his king and lavish gifts, yet he didn't even see Elisha's face. All he got was a message from a servant to wash in the simple, unimpressive Jordan River seven times. To Naaman, who was used to the finest things in life, the Jordan wasn't even as clean as the rivers back in Aram. The idea of washing in that humble river felt humiliating. Furious, he considered returning home. But he and his servants were desperate, and they knew going back wouldn't solve anything.

At the urging of his servants, Naaman finally set aside his preconceptions, pride, and assumptions. With a humble heart, he entered the simple Jordan River and washed seven times, just as Elisha had instructed.

Before he obeyed Elisha, Naaman was convinced his way was right. He thought the rivers in Aram were cleaner and better than the Jordan. Perhaps he had already

bathed in those “clean” rivers, hoping for a cure. But no matter how clear or pure the water was, it couldn’t heal him. It was only when he let go of his stubborn ways and pride and obeyed God’s word that he was restored. His healing came through God, in a way he never expected—from the simplicity of the Jordan River. His life began to change in that humble moment.

Friends, having ears doesn’t mean we always hear God’s voice. Being able to read doesn’t mean we always understand God’s will. To truly hear God and know His will, our hearts and souls must be open.

(Slide 3) In Latin, the word for listening is “audire.” To listen carefully and attentively is “ob-audire,” from which we get the word “obedience.” A life that misses God’s voice is one that’s closed off, swayed by distractions, or forgets that we are God’s beloved children. But when we open our hearts to listen, we find the path to obedience and transformation.

When problems come, many of us first turn to those around us or seek out experts for help. If that doesn’t work, only then do we turn to God in prayer. But Jesus, in His ministry, did the opposite. He began by going up to the mountain to pray all night. Then He loved those around Him and addressed their problems.

Naaman’s transformation, from a life as dazzling as a Fourth of July firework to one restored by God, began with listening to God’s word and obeying in the simplicity of washing in the Jordan. I encourage all of us, in the busyness of our daily lives, to intentionally set aside time to be alone with God in solitude. I call that prayer. In deep communion with God, we can hear His voice calling us His beloved children and restore our true identity.

Let us realize that the transformation of our lives begins in the simplicity we might overlook. May we listen to God’s voice and respond to His call. I pray that we all live lives of obedience to Him. Amen.