

April 7-11, 2025 Edition

Following
The Year(s) Of Jesus Part 170
A Guy Named Naaman

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When you read the Bible ask yourself if there's anything you're reading where God is speaking to you personally... anything that you need to start applying in your own life. Then try to reflect on what you read... what you heard from God throughout the day and we know you'll be blessed.

*** These are EXTREMELY rough drafts so if you see typos... well you knew the rest ;0) These are essentially the ramblings of thoughts running through Ed or Judy's mind the week before Ed teaches a lesson on these concepts. They are pretty much how Ed gets ready for the weekends. They are not necessarily coherent so if they don't make much sense... sorry about that.

**** Also these devotionals are the product of both Judy & Ed's experiences and education. Figuring out which are from Judy and which are from Ed (sometimes both are contained in a single day) is half the fun.

You can also get these devotionals on Riverside's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/EagleRiverside). You don't have to have a FB account to read them but if you do have an account if you "like" the Riverside page and click the box to get updates the devos will show up on your wall every weekday (along with other news and event updates).

Monday Reflection: It's one thing to have perseverance in the big time troubles that often rear their ugly heads and threaten to destroy us. But what about the ordinary stuff that life is often made of? How easy is it for you to persevere when you're not really being threatened by anything other than boredom? Have you ever felt like you truly understood how God must feel about time when Peter said that...

...a day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day.

Ever been there? You've probably been both places- where your days feel like they'll never end and where you wonder where your days went. Perseverance is just as important during these times in our lives as it is when we are going through life shattering troubles. It is often during the mundane chores of life that our character is strengthened to make us strong enough to stand when the storms come. In the Old Testament there is a story about a man named Naaman. He was a general in the Assyrian army. He was very successful but he had a big problem- he had leprosy. One of his slaves was an Israelite and she told Naaman about a prophet in Israel who could cure leprosy. So Naaman got a personal letter from the king of Syria (the most powerful person on the face of the earth at the time) instructing the king of Israel to take care of Naaman and give him whatever he needed.

When the king of Israel got the letter he freaked out, because he had no control over Elisha, the prophet of God. He sent Naaman to see Elisha and I'm sure prayed that God would heal him and that Elisha would be nice. When Naaman got to Elisha's place he was met by a servant who told Naaman to go dip himself in the Jordan river 7 times and his leprosy would be healed. Naaman was mad! Not only was it an insult that the prophet wouldn't come out and meet Naaman face to face, but what kind of miracle was it to have him dip in the Jordan river seven times. The Jordan river was muddy and not even as impressive as the rivers in Syria. I'm sure he expected some big show where Elisha might have come out and prayed a fancy prayer and said some amazing things and gotten a really painful look on his face while he moved his hands all around Naaman until he was healed. Sounds like Naaman was watching a little too much Christian television.

Since Elisha decided not to go with the big show and just told him to dip in the Jordan river seven times Naaman decided to take his toys and go home. Lucky for Naaman his friend was there. He told Naaman that if the prophet had asked him to do something heroic to cure his leprosy he would have done it. Why not go ahead and dip in the Jordan and see what happened? So Naaman did. Can you imagine how Naaman must have felt on the trip to the river? Can you imagine how he must have felt as he walked down into the river by himself with everyone watching him? Can you imagine how he must have felt after dip number six (with everyone still watching him) when he was still covered with leprosy? What would you have done? How would you have felt if you were in Naaman's place?

You are in Naaman's place every day of your life. God has made some unbelievable promises to you that you are banking on, not because you know those promises are true but because you believe they're true. Your faith is coloring the way you live (at least it's supposed to). Biblical belief is not just "believing" that Jesus is the Son of God. It's believing He's the Son of God and letting that change who you are every day of your life.

When you patiently endure the ordinary chores of your life because you trust, you are exhibiting perseverance. You see, perseverance isn't always about facing down lions or standing up to giants- sometimes it's simply being patient with your kids or your spouse even when they so obviously don't deserve it. Sometimes it's continuing to do what God has asked you to do even when it looks like He's slow on providing you with what He's promised to provide. You see, when our need meets the place where God's provision hasn't yet arrived, temptation rears its ugly head. The temptation to take care of what God is obviously too slow to provide. The temptation to provide for ourselves what we think we need. But when we get ahead of God and try to take care of things on our own, nothing but trouble results. We short circuit our quest for enlightenment. The opposite is true as well- when we patiently persevere in the context of our every day, ordinary lives, God's blessing is what we receive.

That's what happened to Naaman. On the seventh dip he was rewarded for doing everything that God had asked of him. When he came up out of the Jordan river after dip number seven he was healed of the leprosy that had plagued his life. But he was only healed because he persevered. I imagine after dips number four, five and six with no sign of a change he was tempted to stop following God's instructions, but he didn't stop- he persevered. And that's what God wants from you. Not just a perseverance that manifests itself in heroic acts of bravery, but a perseverance that demonstrates itself in a quiet faith that changes your life. And that's what biblical belief is- something that changes how you live.

Tuesday Reflection: One lesson we learn from Naaman is that the God of the Bible cannot be controlled or manipulated. Israel was the only country on earth that believed in one God. Every other nation believed in multiple gods- they just believed their god was the best and most powerful. Consequently, the main god in any particular country was intrinsically wrapped up with the king and the government of that nation. So if you wanted something from the god your best bet was to get the king to talk to the god for you. That's why when Naaman hears from his little slave girl that there is a God in Israel that can heal his leprosy he goes directly to... the king. Not to the prophet but first to see the king. Why? Because they assumed that the God of Israel worked the same way all the other gods in the rest of the world were believed to operate. Naaman brought a TON of wealth with him to pay for his healing:

"Go and visit the prophet," the king of Aram told him. "I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel." So Naaman started out, carrying as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter to the king of Israel said: "With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy." 2 Kings 5:5-6 (NLT)

It's hard to correlate exactly how much wealth Naaman is bringing but most scholars believe this is more money than exists in all of Israel at that moment in time. Naaman believes his healing will cost him dearly. So he goes to the king of Israel with a letter asking the king to heal Naaman and when the king of Israel reads it he FREAKS out!

When the King of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "Am I God... Why is this man asking me to heal someone with leprosy? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me." 2 Kings 5:7 (NLT)

Why did he freak out? Because he knew what Naaman didn't- nobody controls this God of Israel. Just because the king wants something done doesn't necessarily mean that God will do it. God is a wild card. You never know what He's going to do. Even years later when Jesus comes to this earth people discovered very quickly they couldn't control or manipulate Him to fulfill their agenda. The Pharisees tried to recruit Him. Didn't work. The people tried to elevate Him to the position of king so he could make their agenda a reality. Didn't work. Even his own family tried to get him to get with their view of what He should be doing. Nope. God cannot be controlled or manipulated.

Have you ever struggled with that? Have you ever fallen into the trap that says, "if I do the right things or pray the right way God will have to give me what I ask for"? I am ashamed to say I fall into that trap more often than I'd like to admit. But prayer isn't our cosmic todo list that we give God and then tap our toes and look at our watch until he fulfills our requirements. Prayer is powerful but it's not a license to control God. It's a way to connect with God and present to Him the things that are most important to us. The things nearest and dearest to our hearts. Then, once we've done that we are to step back and let God be God. We have to learn to trust Him with the things we've prayed for. We have to learn that He will do the best thing in each circumstance for everyone involved. It may not always make sense to us but one thing I've learned in my life- God's way is always more generous and amazing and loving than anything I could have come up with on my own. So let's let God be God.

Wednesday Reflection: Another lesson we learn from Naaman is that when it comes to encountering the God of the Bible- all you need is... nothing (every time I say/write those words I hear the Beatles in my head- all you need is nothing... nah nah nah nah). I once heard Tim Keller say, "if you want God's grace, all you need is need. All you need is nothing. But very few of us have it." I had to think about that. A lot. What does he mean? Is he right? I know that when I was finally ready to ask for God's grace it was when I had exhausted all other avenues of healing/life recovery. I didn't come to Jesus with confidence that He could save my life but with a hopeful expectancy that maybe the preachers I had listened to all my life were right when they said, "Jesus saves." I had always imagined they meant that He save eternally but it had never occurred to me that He might be able to save me in the here and now. So I approached Him. Hesitantly, with a lot of questions and doubt. I had nothing to offer Him and I hoped that was ok. It was.

Naaman learned the same lesson. He came to God with TONS of wealth to offer. He had an amazing resume. His list of accomplishments was like nothing else in that day and age. But it wasn't enough to purchase God's grace and healing. Instead of an exchange of goods and services (which is what Naaman expected) he was told to keep his money. If you want God's grace/healing then just go down to the Jordan river and dip seven times. Huh? Say what? Why would I do that? I came all this way when all it would take to be healed is wash in a river? Why didn't I just do that at home? What was the point of all of this then? The prophet didn't even come out to meet me? What's up with this?

Naaman flips out. Which is interesting in the flow of this story. In our last discussion the king of Israel flips out because Naaman expects him to be able to control the God of the Bible and

the king knows that's not possible. Now Naaman flips out because what he was bringing to the table to pay for God's grace/healing wasn't nearly enough. The prophet doesn't say those words exactly but he does ignore the money and the accomplishments of Naaman. Just go wash yourself 7 times in the River. Why? Why didn't Elisha just go out to Naaman and touch him and utter the words, "be healed?" I don't know but if you're asking that question you're in good company- Naaman wondered the same thing:

But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! Aren't the rivers of Damascus... better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage. 2 Kings 5:11-12 (NLT)

I don't know why God is flashy sometimes (the plagues, the Red Sea, the battle of Jericho, etc.) and why He's so low key sometimes. I'm guessing it has to do with whatever the situation is and who He is dealing with. But in this case God goes with low key. Naaman would rather that the prophet had been blown away by the loot he brought with him or asked him to do some amazing deed to earn his healing. If Elisha had sent his servant out with instructions that Naaman bring the broom of the wicked witch of the west to earn his healing at least he would have understood that. But nothing? He wants nothing for my healing? Why go dip in the Jordan? It doesn't make sense.

Truer words were never spoken. God often doesn't make sense. In fact, I think sometimes God does the unexpected and un-understandable just to make us wake up and really think. Naaman finally decides to do what Elisha told him to do and he was healed. Amazing. To think that all along all Naaman needed to receive God's grace was nothing. And he never had that until now. He had everything a person could possibly want but his sickness made him realize how worthless everything was. It brought him to a place where he truly had nothing. And God took that incredibly valuable commodity from him and gave him back everything. Confused yet? Good. Maybe God's working on you the same way He worked on Naaman. Spend some time today thinking about what it means that to receive God's grace all you need is nothing. The problem is, very few of us have it.

Thursday Reflection: So if all you need is nothing to receive the grace of God then what is all the talk about giving everything to Him? In Philippians chapter 3 the apostle Paul gives us his resume as a Jewish person. He is defending himself against a group of what were called "Judaizing Christians" who would follow him from town to town and tell the gentile Christians he had introduced to the grace of God that Paul was only partially right- that they would indeed be saved by the grace of Jesus but they also had to practice the Jewish law in order to be saved. This FREAKED Paul out. He spends quite a bit of his time disputing this idea throughout the pages of the New Testament (most of which he wrote himself). It's a difficult and subtle difference to comprehend, isn't it? Paul says all you need is nothing to receive the grace of God:

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

But he also talks about giving “everything” to Jesus:

Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ. Philippians 3:8 (NLT)

So what's he getting at? I think maybe Naaman can help us understand. When he first comes to Israel, Naaman brings a staggering amount of wealth with him to “pay” for his healing from the God of the Bible. He learns (as we discussed yesterday) that when it comes to receiving the grace/healing of God all you need is nothing. He ends up doing what Elisha tells him to do because he has found himself at a place where he truly has nothing (for the first time in his life) despite all his wealth and accomplishments. So he approaches God with empty hands and a small amount of hope that He can do what He claims. And Naaman is healed. At this point he goes back to see Elisha (not again because the first time Elisha didn't even come out to meet him) bringing the wealth that Elisha hadn't seemed interested in the first time. This is big- Naaman is already healed. He could have just gone home with his money and saved himself a lot of cash. But here's what I notice over and over again in the pages of the Bible and in the lives of people who've truly met God (including myself)- when we encounter the real God it's not a crazy though to give everything of ourselves.

But is that what Naaman is doing? I think so. Not because he begs Elijah to take the money he's brought with him. That money isn't all of his money. Just part of it. What indicates that Naaman has made the decision to give ALL of himself to the God of Israel lies in Naaman's parting words to the prophet:

Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord. However, may the Lord pardon me in this one thing: When my master the King goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, may the Lord pardon me when I bow, too." "Go in peace," Elisha said. So Naaman started home again. 2 Kings 5:17-19 (NLT)

Naaman wants to take a bunch of dirt home with him. Why? Well, commentators think it has something to do with the second request Naaman makes of Elisha. I used to think that when Naaman said he would bow with his king at the temple of Rimmon that he was suggesting that he would be an “undercover” believer. That he would go back to Syria but he wouldn't tell anyone there had been a change in his life. Doesn't sound like what God is looking for, does it? But what Naaman seems to be saying here is far more radical than anything most of us would dream of doing as modern believers- commentators believe that what this story is telling us is that Naaman is going to bring some Israel dirt into the temple of Rimmon and when he bows next to his king (who is worshipping Rimmon), Naaman would bow with his knees touching what he considered to be “holy ground”. It wasn't going to be a secret. Naaman was going to proclaim to the world that he was a believer in Yahweh. It would have meant that he was literally giving everything to God because it might mean the loss of his own life.

But Naaman does it. He doesn't even question it. He can no longer do anything else. He is completely and totally God's. Everything he has is God's. Naaman is now a “Jesus Freak” (so

to speak... obviously the Name, Jesus, hasn't been associated with God yet but you get the picture, don't you?). How about you? How about me? Are we "Jesus Freaks", whatever that means? I don't mean irritating and in people's faces- there are probably more than enough of those in this world. I'm talking about people who have given everything to/for Jesus. I wish I could say I'm more confident about my ability to give Him everything. Sometimes I know I fall miserably short of where I'd like to be. But I'm working on it. How about you?

Friday Reflection: So I just want to mention one more thing before we leave Naaman this week and that is, this story (as is the case with the entire story of the Old Testament and the story of the entire Bible) revolves around forgiveness, grace and mercy. Not only do the stories revolve around these virtues- they are infused with them. We've been focusing on Naaman and Elisha during this week's study but they really aren't the leading stars of this story. The star of this story is barely mentioned and only at the beginning of the tale:

At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid. One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy." 2 Kings 5:2-3 (NLT)

Who was this little girl? She was a slave. She had been taken from her home in Israel and forced into slavery. More than likely her entire town had been destroyed. More than like she had watched as those she loved were killed or taken to be forced into slavery as well. More than likely if she had any siblings they were slaves as well in different parts of the country. She had every reason to hate Naaman who was the man who directed the armies of Syria. He was pretty much responsible for the position she now found herself in. How would you react? How would I? I don't know for sure but I know this- prevailing human wisdom would say she would hate this guy. Prevailing human wisdom would say she should watch Naaman rot away from leprosy secretly revealing in the fact that she had the key to his healing but would never give it to him. She would watch as pieces of him started falling off and maybe only tell Naaman's wife that she could have saved him after his death. That seems like what she should do, doesn't it?

She doesn't though. She forgives Naaman and tries to help him. Why? How? What's up with that? Well, in her captivity she is becoming more like the God that she worship rather than more like the people of this world. She is rejecting prevailing human wisdom and embracing the wisdom of God. She tells her captor how he can be saved and we never read about her again. But think about it- I imagine God was pretty pleased with Elisha, His prophet. But how proud must He have been of this little girl who chooses love, acceptance and forgiveness over hate, bitterness and rejection? And with this one act a little girl gives the world another preview of what Jesus' life would be all about. Just another sign of Who God is and what His life is/would be about.

But let me leave you with one more thought. What do you think the little girl's life was like after Naaman returned healed and whole? How does her life change as a result of what happened in Israel? I imagine it was better, don't you? I'd imagine Naaman and his wife were very grateful for her advice to seek out the prophet of God in Israel. I imagine things were

looking up for that little girl. It's something God is always trying to convince us of- that generosity is always repaid. So let me leave you with this:

*The generous will prosper; those who refresh others will themselves be refreshed.
Proverbs 11:25 (NLT)*

Do you believe that? It doesn't mean your generosity will always be paid back by those you were generous to. Sometimes people will take advantage of your generosity but even then the Bible assures us that God always repays generosity. Maybe not in the way we thought He would be nevertheless- God always repays generosity.