

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5:1-14

*<sup>1</sup> Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man, though a mighty warrior, suffered from a skin disease. <sup>2</sup> Now the Arameans on one of their raids had taken a young girl captive from the land of Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup> She said to her mistress, "If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his skin disease." <sup>4</sup> So Naaman went in and told his lord just what the girl from the land of Israel had said. <sup>5</sup> And the king of Aram said, "Go, then, and I will send along a letter to the king of Israel."*

*He went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten sets of garments. <sup>6</sup> He brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his skin disease." <sup>7</sup> When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his skin disease? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me."*

*<sup>8</sup> But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent a message to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel." <sup>9</sup> So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and halted at the entrance of Elisha's house. <sup>10</sup> Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."*

*<sup>11</sup> But Naaman became angry and went away, saying, “I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God and would wave his hand over the spot and cure the skin disease! <sup>12</sup> Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” He turned and went away in a rage. <sup>13</sup> But his servants approached and said to him, “Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” <sup>14</sup> So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.*

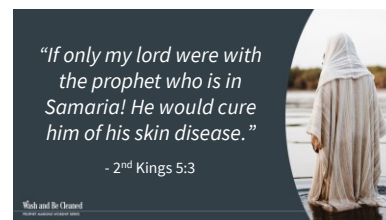


When I was a kid, my mom would ask, ‘Did you wash your hands?’ after I came out of the bathroom or as we sat down to the table. Did anyone else experience that as a kid? Did

any of you ask your kids the same question? What is so important about washing our hands? Other than the basic hygiene that it provides, washing our hands is a sign of readiness and consideration. The question, on a deeper level, was asking if we were ready to be in community with others. It asks if we are ready to engage in conversation and other forms of interaction. There are also implications – if we are not willing to wash our hands, then maybe we are withholding ourselves from others or maybe we do not care if we negatively impact others. Our text for today is, in part, about obedience and submitting to authority. As we prepare to work through this text about Naaman and Elisha, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Today's text from 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5 centers on Naaman the Syrian. He is a powerful military leader who is used to being respected, obeyed, maybe even feared. Many people in positions of authority feel these things and think in these ways. There are many leaders and people in places of authority who we could point to today who are aloof and self-centered. Many of them have access to the best doctors and to top notch medical care. Regular health concerns are of no worry to those who walk the halls of power. Until they become ill with something that cannot be cured. In his day, such was the case with Naaman. He had leprosy, an incurable and painful skin disease.

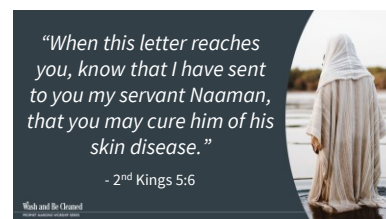
In verse 2 we learn that a young slave girl, captured during a raid into Israel, knows of one who could heal Naaman. In verse 3 she says to Naaman's wife, her master, *"If only my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his skin disease."* Can you hear the trust that she has in God? Can you feel her belief that the prophet in Samaria can heal Naaman? She has such a strong faith. We must ask ourselves: Do we offer hope or guide people to go to God in prayer with this same confidence? Like this young girl who spoke from the margins, do we too raise our voice to invite others into relationship with the Lord?



This news of a possible healing sparks a feeling of hope in the household. With this hope, Naaman secures a letter from the king of Aram to the king of Israel, seeking healing for his general. Naaman was a man of power. He knew the channels of political diplomacy well. The king sends Naaman to Israel, along with the letter and some silver and gold and garments.

When we are in need of something from someone or even from God, do we do little kindnesses or offer gifts? Or do we try some form of convincing God that we deserve this thing or that outcome?

The letter says, *“When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you my servant Naaman, that you may cure him of his skin disease.”* The king of Israel is distraught – he is not God, he knows that he cannot heal. He thinks the king of Aram is trying to pick a fight with him, asking him to do this impossible thing for Naaman. Soon Elisha hears of the king’s distress and sends him a message: *“Let him come to me, that he may learn that there is a prophet in Israel.”* I wonder, did the king of Israel believe this to be true? Did he have the same confidence in God that the slave girl had in God? Did he at least come to this kind of faith after hearing of the miracle?



Next, we see that Naaman arrives at Elisha’s home. There is no greeting, no dinner, no fanfare from Elisha when this powerful leader arrives. Instead Elisha simply sends out a messenger to Naaman, telling him, *“Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”* But instead of doing this thing, Naaman becomes greatly upset. How dare Elisha not at least come out? How dare he not even greet me? This was not how Naaman was used to being treated. He was a man who commanded respect and was held in high regard. And all he got from Elisha was a simple message, delivered through a servant no less: *“Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean.”*



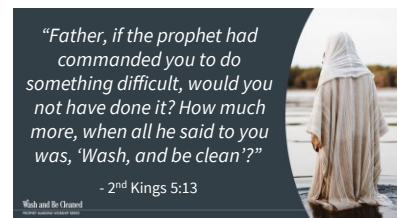
Naaman is infuriated. Deeply offended, he storms off. It was too much to believe that he could wash and be cleaned.



Usually when one is sick, when one is desperate for a cure, there is not much room for pride, is there? After living with a condition such as leprosy or cancer or any other long-term illness, most folks get to the point where they would do anything to be healed of their disease. If an offer were made that could bring healing, most people would jump at the opportunity. But not Naaman.

Hear his contempt and disgust in verses 11 and 12: *“I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God and would wave his hand over the spot and cure the skin disease! Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?”* For me, for the great Naaman, you’d think the prophet would at least come out and greet me. You’d think he’d at least come out and do something amazing that would invite his god to engage with me, to bring my body the healing that I so deserve. And to boot, couldn’t have I just washed in the rivers back home? Those waters are at least as good as this piddly little Jordan River. Oh the disgust and rage!

But then, just as he is about to storm off, stomping all the way back to Aram, Naaman’s servants slow him down, draw him back to why they came to Israel in the first place. Again, voices from the margins speak. These servants say to Naaman, in verse 13, *“Father, if the prophet had commanded you to do something difficult, would you not have done it? How much more, when all he said to you was, ‘Wash, and be clean’?”*



*‘Wash, and be clean’?*” This makes sense to Naaman. He returns to the Jordan and dips himself in the waters seven times, probably feeling more and more ridiculous each time as he neared the seventh. How many times do you think he pondered storming out of the water before he got to seven?

Naaman was a man of great pride. I’d imagine after the second or third dip, when nothing seemed to be changing, that Naaman was about ready to ramp up the anger again and storm off down the road. Patience and trust can be hard to come by when one is prideful and selfish. Just wash and be cleaned?



Many years ago, in early September, I went to Denver with a group of men from the church to a Promise Keepers event. I was teaching at Dakota Middle School at that time and was helping with the youth group at church. I also had an FCA Bible study one morning a week in my room with a few students. I knew that an annual event was coming up that next week. On the third Wednesday in September staff and students all across America would gather around the flagpole at their schools to pray for the school, for the staff, for the students. The event continues to this day and is called “See You at the Pole.”

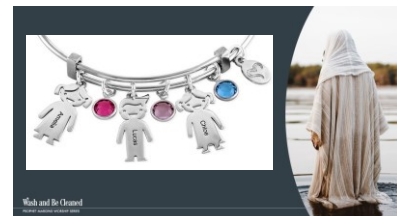
During breaks between worship and speakers, I noticed that the event organizers would run advertisements for different things on the big screens in the Pepsi Center. As I sat there and looked around the room, I saw thousands of dads. I thought, “How great would it be to announce the upcoming ‘See You at the Pole’ event at this Promise Keepers gathering?”

Imagine all the dads that would go and pray with their students at their schools! So I headed off and found the command center and asked someone about doing just that. The man I had spoken with asked me to wait for a few minutes. He returned and apologized, saying that they couldn't advertise for other group's events. I became like Naaman, ready to stomp out of that room and even out of the arena.

The man asked if I would be willing to come with him to the prayer room so that they could pray for me and for this upcoming event. Reluctant would be the word I would use to describe myself. Maybe angry too.

But I said "OK" and he walked me to the prayer room. Stepping inside he explained to the person in charge why we were there. About a dozen people gathered around me and laid hands on me and began to pray over me. My heart softened just a little bit as I could feel their hands and hear their prayers being poured out over me and over the upcoming 'See You at the Pole' event. After a short time the prayers finished, and I was ready to head back to my seat. I'd moved from reluctant to a little thankful, from angry to feeling some peace. But God was not done yet. As I turned to leave, a young woman asked if she could share something with me. I said yes.

She had been on the periphery of the prayer group. And now this voice from the margins spoke as one with a word of God, ready to share it with me. This young woman shared that she had a vision while they were praying over me. She shared that she saw me in heaven, wearing a little charm bracelet with a bunch of children charms on it.



She shared that she was told in her vision that each charm represented a child that I had helped to know the Lord. She told me that God wanted me to know that what I was doing was making a difference. I bet I felt like Naaman felt after the seventh dip into the Jordan. Praise be to God!

After the seventh dip, hear how God worked: *“His flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.”*

Naaman experienced what had felt like the impossible. His rough, scaly, painful, ugly skin was restored to that of a young boy – clean, pure, fresh. What a radical change. What a turn of events! God, as only God can, used a little girl to initiate not only the healing of a foreigner but also to witness to God’s power to do the impossible, to cure an incurable disease. This begs these questions: How might God want to use you or me if we trust as this young girl did, if we are willing to invite others to turn to God as she invited Naaman to do? In what ways could we see someone washed and made clean if we are willing to speak from the margins?



Before we hear the rest of the story for Naaman, what lessons can we learn from Elisha? First, Elisha stays faithful, and he stays humble. Revealing a deep faith in God, he tells the king of Israel, don’t panic, God has this. And he remains true to who he is when this powerful general appears at his doorstep. He does not run out and fall all over himself welcoming and fawning over the great Naaman. Elisha simply listens to the Spirit and sends a messenger to tell a man to bathe in the waters of the Jordan. He was quite content to stay along the margins, not seeking glory for himself.



Elisha knew who the focus was; he knew where the power to heal lay. He played his part, bringing God the glory. Like Elisha, may we seek to be humble servants of our God most high.

As we come near to a close, turn with me to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5, continuing on in verse 15, as we hear the rest of the story. As I walked out of that prayer room at the Promise Keepers event, I was humbled and deeply moved by the vision that was shared with me. Assured of God's presence and of the purposes that God had for me, I almost floated back to my seat. Returning to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5, I'll be reading verses 15 and 16.

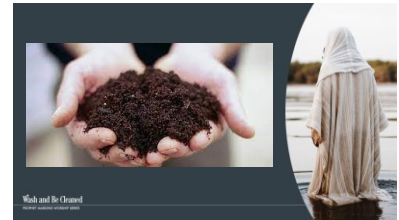
*<sup>15</sup> Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company; he came and stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel; please accept a present from your servant." <sup>16</sup> But he said, "As the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will accept nothing!" He urged him to accept, but he refused.*

Naaman has gone from skeptic to true believer, from angry to humbly grateful. He wants to express his gratitude by giving a gift to Elisha. Something amazing has been done for him and he wants to express his thanks. But Elisha refuses the gift. He knows that it was God who healed Naaman. It is thanks enough that another has come to faith in the Lord. These are places that we have all been – either grateful for what God has done for us and wanting to show our thanks to God or knowing what God has done for another and deferring the credit to God. It is awesome that God has been glorified through the healing of Naaman the Syrian. But the story does not end even here.

Continuing on, hear what happens next in verses 17-19:

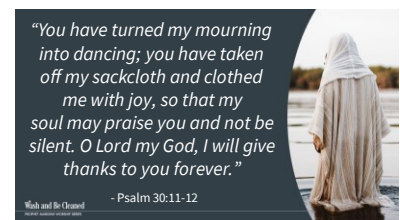
*“Then Naaman said, ‘If not, please let two mule-loads of earth be given to your servant; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god except the LORD.*

*But may the LORD pardon your servant on one count: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I do bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant on this one count.’ Elisha said to him, ‘Go in peace.’”*



What great faith! Naaman’s faith now matches that of the slave girl. Naaman will haul back two mule-loads of dirt so that he can create a place to worship God back home in Aram. He declares that God will be his only god. Realizing a potential conflict, Naaman asks for pardon for helping the king to worship in the temple of Rimmon, a local god. Naaman will serve the king and will physically bow down to support the king, but Naaman will not worship and bow down spiritually to any God but the one true God that brought him healing.

As we close, I do so with these words from Psalm 30. David is the probable author, and he is likely writing after recovering from a grave illness. In verses 11 and 12 we read these words of praise and worship: *“You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.”*



Like Naaman, David has been healed and restored to full life. The mourning has been replaced with joy and with praise to God. And like Naaman, David pledges to worship the Lord all of his days. My friends, when have you received healing from the Lord? When have you been washed and made clean? As we reflect on these experiences this week, may we too come to a place of joy and worship. May we celebrate the healing and wholeness that we each receive from the Lord our God. And may we each find space and opportunity this week to offer God's healing and wholeness to others. May it be so for you and for me this week. Amen and amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. How have you (or someone you know and love) experienced God's healing power in your life? How has that deepened your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. In your quiet time this week, reflect upon some specific instances when God healed and/or restored you. Offer a prayer of thanksgiving and worship!
- 3) *Study*. Re-read 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 5:15-19. What 'dirt' do you take with you as a reminder of the awesome power of the Lord our God?