

GOD'S HAND IN RESTORING LIVES

Leader pages on pp. 152-155

THE POINT:
GOD RESTORES US AS WE ARE OBEDIENT TO HIM.

2 KINGS 5:1-3,10-19A

¹ Naaman, commander of the army for the king of Aram, was a man important to his master and highly regarded because through him, the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was a valiant warrior, but he had a skin disease.

² Aram had gone on raids and brought back from the land of Israel a young girl who served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his skin disease."

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¹⁰ Then Elisha sent him a messenger, who said, "Go wash seven times in the Jordan and your skin will be restored and you will be clean." ¹¹ But Naaman got angry and left, saying, "I was telling myself: He will surely come out, stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the skin disease. ¹² Aren't Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and left in a rage.

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¹³ But his servants approached and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more should you do it when he only tells you, 'Wash and be clean'?" ¹⁴ So Naaman went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, according to the command of the man of God. Then his skin was restored and became like the skin of a small boy, and he was clean. ¹⁵ **Then Naaman and his whole company went back to the man of God, stood before him, and declared, "I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel.** Therefore, please accept a gift from your servant." ¹⁶ But Elisha said, "As the LORD lives, in whose presence I stand, I will not accept it." Naaman urged him to accept it, but he refused. ¹⁷ Naaman responded, "If not, please let your servant be given as much soil as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will no longer offer a burnt offering or a sacrifice to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ However, in a particular matter may the LORD pardon your servant: When my master, the king of Aram, goes into the temple of Rimmon to bow in worship while he is leaning on my arm, and I have to bow in the temple of Rimmon—when I bow in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this matter." ¹⁹ So he said to him, "Go in peace."

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MEMORY VERSE

KEYWORDS

Skin disease (v. 1)—the Hebrew term can be translated as "leprosy," the generic phrase skin disease better conveys the meaning of the Hebrew word because it is a collective term for a variety of ailments of the skin.

Wash . . . Jordan (v. 10)—Elisha's message to Naaman reflects

the instructions God gave concerning ritual cleansing in Leviticus 13–14. The Hebrew term for wash appears in Leviticus 14:8–9.

Go in peace (v. 19)—With these words, Elisha indicated that Naaman's heart orientation toward God was correct.

DOES GOD HAVE A PROCESS FOR OUR RESTORATION?

Contestant number 43,212 walked onto the stage to audition for Britain's Got Talent. She stood in sharp contrast to previous performers. Unkempt curly hair and a less than flattering dress suggested a frumpy housewife. Simon Cowell interviewed her briefly and her admission that she was 47 years old caused raised eyebrows and scattered laughter from the audience. Her awkward verbal responses added to the anticipation that her performance would be cut short quickly. Expectations hit rock bottom when she revealed the ambitious choice to sing "I Dreamed a Dream" from Les Misérables.

But when contestant number 43,212 finished singing just the first phrase, "I dreamed a dream in time gone by" the audience had begun to cheer and applaud while each judge wore a look of amazement and disbelief. Her voice was beautiful and strong. She finished the song to a standing ovation, and Susan Boyle was on her way. Simon Cowell said later she was the textbook example of "never judge a book by its cover."

Sometimes God surprises us in the same way, working in ways and through people we might not expect.

Listen for God's Voice //

2 Kings 5:1-3

Elijah and Elisha served as the prophets of God to Israel during a time when Israel was far from God. In response to Israel's rebellion, God worked through the prophets, encouraging Israel to return to Him and His covenant with them. One way God sought their return was through judgment implemented by conflict and wars with foreign kingdoms. Aram was one of those kingdoms. This sets the stage for not only a miraculous healing of an Aramean army commander but also the opportunity to see God's hand at work through some unlikely people. In fact, the story of Naaman includes a series of unlikely events.

Naaman is introduced to us in verse 1 with a glowing resume: commander of the army of Aram, important to his master, highly regarded, and a valiant warrior. There was just one problem. He had a skin disease. We're not told to what degree this disease showed up on Naaman's body, but his later actions proved this was a grave concern to him and it's easy to understand why. Here was this great man, renowned for his achievements and importance, yet the stigma of the skin disease caused revulsion and rejection by those who



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saw him. Such a contrast would make anyone desperate for restoration, including Naaman

Verse 2 tells us that a young Israelite girl served Naaman's wife. We can assume that her place in the household was the bottom rung of the ladder based on the fact that she was a captive and a young girl. The disparity between her status as slave and Naaman's status as a commander of the army and valiant warrior could not be greater. No one could anticipate that the solution to Naaman's skin disease might rest with her. But it did.

Showing deference to the master of the household, the Israelite girl made known to her mistress the presence of a prophet in Israel who could cure Naaman of his disease. Is this coincidence? Not at all. This was God's hand at work through an unlikely person. God used a Jewish servant girl to point Naaman's wife to the prophet of God.

This shouldn't surprise us. God's Word tells us that God often works through the small, the lowly, and the weak. Previously we saw God multiply a small amount of oil to fill a multitude of containers so that it could be sold in order to provide for a prophet's family (2 Kings 4:1-7). In John's Gospel, Jesus used five barley loaves and two fish to feed over five thousand people (John 6:1-15). But God isn't limited to working through insignificant or unlikely things. He also works through unlikely people, just as He did with the young servant girl in Naaman's household. And unfortunately, that can sometimes surprise us.

Honestly, we're not fans of that which qualifies as unlikely. We're taught that the unlikely presents risk, has a low probability of success, and doesn't deserve consideration. So, when the unlikely person rises to the occasion, it amazes us.

WHEN HAS GOD USED SOMEONE UNEXPECTED TO HELP YOU IN YOUR SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

Humble Yourself // 2 Kings 5:10-12

Obedience plays many roles in a believer's walk with God. It's an understatement to say that obedience is important to a believer. Yet obedience is also something we can struggle with on a regular basis. The reasons we do are many, but the story of Naaman focuses on a big one: pride.

To fully appreciate these verses, we must keep the back story in view. In response to Naaman's request, the king of Aram appealed to the king of Israel, a kingdom Naaman had raided and robbed. To travel back into this kingdom with a small entourage speaks either of desperation or reckless pride, and I'm guessing it may have



DIGGING DEEPER NAAMAN

The Book of 2 Kings introduced Naaman, a respectable man of prominence and power in his society (5:1). While his name means "pleasant", it is ironic that Naaman faced the unpleasant circumstance of leprosy. His life reveals that even people of influence and importance are not exempt from the issues of life. In spite of his status, he pursued a journey of healing and restoration. First, he paid attention to the advice of a servant girl. Secondly, he let go of his pride and dipped seven times in the Jordan river. His pride was evident because his initial attitude brought complaints about God's unconventional means of healing in his life. Finally, he not only experienced physical healing becoming cured of leprosy, but also spiritual transformation because of the conscious choice to obey the instructions of prophet Elisha.

What role does obedience play in the healing process of your own life?

been the latter. Surely when the king of Israel came face to face with the great warrior Naaman, he would bend over backwards to accommodate him, but such was not the case. Arriving in Israel with a substantial gift, he was simply redirected to an unknown prophet of a God he didn't know.

Now in verse 10, waiting to see Elisha, Naaman was instead met by a messenger who spoke one sentence: "Go wash seven times in the Jordan and your skin will be restored and you will be clean." Have you ever called the customer service number for your bank or insurance company seeking information or assistance only to be transferred multiple times to multiple departments? If so, you have an idea of how Naaman felt at this point.

Verse 11 reveals that Naaman became angry. We know by his comments that his anger was rooted in his pride. Naaman had some very specific expectations. He expected Elisha to meet him face to face. He expected Elisha to plead on his behalf to the Lord his God. He expected the healing to be spectacular, a great show of power and supernatural effort. Why did he expect all that? Because in his mind he was worth it. This is further confirmed when he compared the Jordan river to the rivers of Aram. This prophet commanded him to wash in the dark, muddy Jordan instead of the superior rivers of Aram. Not only did he surmise that a positive outcome was unlikely, but he was also offended by the way he was treated. This "extraordinary" man was given ordinary instructions, and it insulted his sense of self-worth and pride. So, what did he do? Verse 12 tells us he turned and left in a rage. His pride didn't lead him towards the Jordan. His pride led him to disobedience. When have you seen pride get in the way of obedience?

God's commands always require obedience. This was one of the problems that dogged God's people in the Old Testament for hundreds of years. They knew God's commands, but they didn't obey them. Regardless of how big or small God's command, it's always in our best interest to obey.

HOW CAN WE CULTIVATE HEARTS THAT ARE WILLING TO OBEY, EVEN IN MUNDANE SITUATIONS?



Walk in Obedience // 2 Kings 5:13-19a

The story of Naaman's healing includes a series of striking contrasts.

Naaman, the commander of Aram's army, was saved by one of his captives, an Israelite servant girl. The power of the king of Israel was useless in the face of leprosy, but a prophet proved instrumental in Naaman's miraculous healing. Naaman, who was highly regarded back home, was received by a messenger instead of Elisha and is given one ordinary command.

And now we see one more contradiction: the lowly servants of Naaman were wiser than him. We're not told much about Naaman's servants, but we can suggest some reasons for their willingness to speak to Naaman about his refusal to follow Elisha's instructions.

Regardless, it took courage to speak to Naaman this way. Their logic was impeccable but that doesn't always calm a raging attitude. But to his credit, Naaman listened and obeyed. I love the simplicity of verse 14. In the course of two sentences, a proud, arrogant enemy of God and His people was humbled and healed, all because he obeyed.

Humility has been given a bad rap in today's society, often cast as a lack of motivation or courage. However, humility towards God and His commands, manifested through obedience, is for our good. Naaman proved it. And in Naaman's case, his obedience led to his restoration, both physically and spiritually. The physical restoration was immediately obvious, but it took a trip back to

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Elisha's house to reveal the spiritual restoration. In what ways does the world demonstrate that obedience is optional?

In verse 15 Naaman said something to Elisha that needs our full attention: "I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel." That defied everything Naaman had ever heard or been taught about the gods. It shows that Naaman came to a right decision about God through God's activity in his life: the God of Israel is the one true God. He demonstrated the authenticity of his restoration in three ways.

1. **Gratitude.** Naaman demonstrated gratitude by urging Elisha to accept his extravagant gift in vv. 15-16.
2. **Commitment.** Naaman's request for "as much soil as a pair of mules can carry" was a sign of his utmost desire to demonstrate his commitment to the Lord.
3. **More obedience.** It's true: obedience leads to restoration and restoration leads to more obedience.

God always responds positively to our obedience. And humble obedience sets the stage for God to do His greatest work: restoration.

WHY IS OBEDIENCE TO GOD A NON-NEGOTIABLE STEP IN THE PROCESS OF RESTORATION?

DID YOU KNOW?

In Biblical times, leprosy was an infectious skin disease leading to individual's treated as social outcasts. When a person had leprosy, there were regulations and guidelines followed in accordance with the Mosaic law (Lev. 13:1-46). Although there is no exact equivalent to leprosy in our modern times, our society has been plagued with conditions that carry similarities in terms of social stigma and fear. In the early 21st century, HIV/AIDS was found in higher proportions of new infections in the Black community compared to other ethnicities. "Black people accounted for 13% of the U.S. population but 40% of people with HIV in 2019."¹⁶ People living with HIV/AIDS faced discrimination and ostracism due to misinformation and fear surrounding the disease. Disparities also exist with mental conditions. "Black people with mental health conditions, particularly schizophrenia or bipolar disorders, are more likely to be incarcerated than people of other races."¹⁷

Biblical Truth: There is no condition beyond the power of Jehovah Rapha.

What experiences can you share involving physical or mental conditions?

LIVE IT

What areas of your life require humble obedience to the commands of God?

Restoration through obedience is an ongoing pursuit. It requires you to stay grounded and connected to purpose. Choose one or more of the activities below to help you move through the process.

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- **Request.** Spend time in prayer asking God to show you areas in your life where obedience is a struggle. Pay close attention to those areas where pride can become a barrier. Choose one area and make it a matter of ongoing prayer.
- **Restore.** Enlist a brother or sister in Christ to hold you accountable for your obedience in an area in which it is difficult to obey. Schedule meetings and give them permission to speak truthfully to you.
- **Remember.** Remind yourself of the many reasons behind your pursuit of obedience and restoration. Is personal fulfillment spiritual growth, or closer relationships with loved ones your inspiration?

DAILY READINGS

1. FROM TINY TO TITAN // 1 KINGS 17:12-16

According to the National Park Service, the seed of a sequoia tree is “about the size of a pinhead.” Yet, the General Sherman Tree, a sequoia in California, has grown into the largest tree in the world at more than 270 feet tall. The trunk alone measures 52,000 cubic feet in volume, and, at 2,000 pounds, is said to equal the weight of 400 elephants. “There are taller trees and wider trees, but the General Sherman Tree contains more wood (volume) in its trunk than any other tree on Earth,”¹⁸ says Atlas Obscura. If God can create this massive and glorious tree from a tiny seed, He can bless us mightily through what might be considered small or insignificant. We need only to believe.

Faith the size of a mustard seed, can move mountains.

2. DO WHAT HE SAYS! // JOSHUA 22:5

Obedience. Folks don't like talking about obedience. Oh, sure, children are expected to obey their parents and elders, but grown folk should be able to do what they want to, right? Well, whether we like it or not, the Christian walk requires obedience to God. His Word tells us how we are expected to live. The Bible is not a list of suggestions, but rather God's loving directives and commands for us. When we live obediently, life generally goes well. Consider which is better: routinely overindulging in unhealthy food and experiencing the resulting aftereffects or following God's directive to eschew gluttony and reaping the resulting effects of good health, and honor to God.

As Christians, we must choose obedience.

3. RESTORED // PSALM 103:3-5

The process of restoring a damaged piece of art can be long and tedious. The goal is to make the artwork resemble as closely as possible what the artist originally created. The restoration process can begin decades or even centuries after the artwork's initial creation. With an especially old or ancient piece, applying long-gone painting or other creative techniques help ensure successful restoration. But sometimes, mistakes happen. A valuable 3,000-year-old mask of Egyptian King Tutankhamen was

accidentally broken. The initial solution was to glue the broken piece back on the mask, which caused further damage. Thankfully, painstaking restoration efforts finally returned the piece to its original beauty.¹⁹ God has a divine restoration process for His people. He knows all about our brokenness and can make us whole again.

The Creator knows how to restore His creation.

4. WHO WINS? YOU WIN! // EPHESIANS 6:12

What does it mean to be in a “spiritual battle”? It means that Satan and his posse are trying to destroy your faith, your hope and your life. It means that he is using everything in his limited power—illness, injury, divorce, loss, finances, low self-esteem, and much more—to cause you to doubt yourself and God. Ephesians 6:12 says, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.” But take heart, God is also fighting on your side and has given us the armor we need to battle (Eph. 6:11). His angels are defending you against Satan's henchmen, and Jesus is interceding for you in prayer. What's more, God has equipped you with spiritual weapons with which to defend yourself and proactively defeat Satan.

With God's power, there is only one guaranteed outcome: You win!

5. ALL-KNOWING WARRIOR // 2 KINGS 6:9-10

Imagine you are fighting a war. You have your weapons at the ready. You have plotted out your strategy. You are well-prepared to move forward and fight. Yet, even though you are confident, wouldn't it be helpful to know your enemy's strategy, too? Wouldn't knowing that help you determine your own strategy and offer you the best chance at victory? If only all wars were like that. Well, spiritual battles are exactly like that, if we look to God for help. God knows everything, even what our enemies are thinking and plotting against us. God is in the details. No matter how intense the battle, or how likely defeat might seem, God is still in control.

God will help you find your way to victory. Trust He is in control!