

Just Seven Little Baths

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Sometimes we ask God for help, and we want—more than that, we EXPECT—something big, something showy. Sometimes we even believe we DESERVE special treatment! But often God chooses not to work that way. Then the question becomes: Will we accept God's help on His terms? It's amazing how often people say "no."

This story is about an army officer from Aram (modern-day Syria) who felt God should show a little more respect for a man in his position. It comes from 2 Kings, Chapter 5.

The king of Aram's army was under the command
of a man named Naaman,
and the king thought very highly of him.
He was a great warrior,
one who had led the army of Aram to many victories.
But Naaman had leprosy,
a very contagious skin disease for which there was no cure.

The kingdoms of Israel and Aram were constantly at war,
and groups of raiders would invade Israel
to rob them and capture Israelites as slaves.
One of those slaves was a young girl
who was given to Naaman's wife to be her maid.

And Naaman, despite his position
(which could have made him a difficult man)
and his disease
(which could have made him a bitter man),
must have been a very kind man because the girl felt bad for him.
She said to Naaman's wife,
"I wish my master would go visit the prophet in Samaria.
I'm sure he would heal him of his leprosy."

Naaman's wife told Naaman what the girl said.
Then he told the king, and the king said,
"I think that is a wonderful idea!
I will write a letter to the king of Israel,
so he will know I sent you."
Then Naaman traveled to Israel,
carrying many gifts of gold and silver and clothing
and a letter from the king of Aram that simply said,
"This man Naaman is my servant.
I want you to heal him of his leprosy."

When the king of Israel read the letter,
he was so afraid that he ripped his own clothes in despair.
"Does he think I'm God? I can't heal lepers!
He's just looking for another excuse to attack us!"

But the prophet in Samaria —
Elisha, the student of the great prophet Elijah —
found out about the letter and sent his own message:
"Don't be so upset. Just send Naaman to me,
and I'll show him that true prophets come from Israel."

So Naaman drove his horses and chariots to Elisha's house and waited...
but the prophet never even came to the door.
Instead, he sent one of his servants to give Naaman this message:
"Go to the Jordan River and take seven baths.
That will do the trick."

Naaman was so angry he stomped away from Elisha's house,
grumbling all the way.

"Who does he think he is, anyway?" he growled.
"I thought he would at least come out, wave his hand over me,
and call on his God to heal me. But he wouldn't even speak to me himself!

And what makes the Jordan River any better than the rivers in Aram?
Why couldn't I just bathe in one of them? I don't need this!"

But as he stomped off in a rage, the officers with him pulled him aside.
"Sir, think about this for a moment.
If this Elisha had told you to do something difficult,
wouldn't you have done it?
But he gave you a simple task that anyone could do... so why not do it?
Obey him and be cured!"

So Naaman finally agreed and did as Elisha had told him.

And miracle of miracles, *Naaman's leprosy just vanished.*
He was cured!

So he turned his entire party around and went back to thank Elisha.
This time Elisha came out to meet him, and Naaman said,
"Now I know that the only real God is the God of Israel.
Please, accept these gifts with my thanks."

But Elisha wouldn't take them. He said,
"I did this for my God, not your gifts."

So Naaman said, "I understand. But let me ask you for one favor:

Let me take two of my mules and load them with dirt from this place.
I will take it home with me and build an altar on it,
because I will never again sacrifice to any god
but the God of Israel.

But the king of Aram is my master. He worships the god Rimmon and,
when he goes into Rimmon's temple, I have to help him in and out.
Please, ask the Lord to forgive me when I have to bow as well."

Then Elisha nodded and simply said, "Go in peace, Naaman."
And Naaman did.

Many years later, when Jesus was preaching in a village synagogue,
He angered many religious leaders when He mentioned Naaman.
Luke 4:27 records Jesus telling them that during the time of Elisha
there were many Israelites who were lepers, but none of them were healed —
only Naaman, who wasn't even from Israel!

His point was that Naaman was the only leper
who was willing to do what God told him,
and that God cares as much about what we do as who we are.

It's a lesson we all need to hear repeated every now and then.