Naaman the Leper

Bible Stories Anthology — 2 Kings 5

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> **Romans 15:4** *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

Why These Stories Were Written — Romans 15:4

Paul had just quoted a thousand-year-old psalm and applied it to Christ (Romans 15:3, quoting Psalm 69:9), and then he explained why he could: *whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning*. **Written aforetime** — the scriptures that already stood before this present age of grace opened at Pentecost: the record God gave through Moses, the prophets and the writings, along with the Gospel accounts of Christ's earthly ministry, which belong to that same time before Pentecost. (When Paul wrote these words, the scriptures he had in hand were the Hebrew scriptures; the Gospels had not yet been written down.) **Written for our learning** — "learning" is the Greek word for *teaching*, the very word rendered "doctrine" in 2 Timothy 3:16. These are not quaint tales; they are doctrine in narrative form. Adam, Ruth and David never knew us, but God did, and He had their lives recorded with us in mind — written *for* us, though not all of it written *to* us, which is why we read Israel's history as our instruction and not as our marching orders. **Through patience and comfort of the scriptures** — "patience" is literally *remaining under*, the staying power we gain from watching men and women stay under a load; "comfort" is a *calling alongside*, the strength God brings when He meets them there, which is why Paul calls Him "the God of patience and consolation" in the very next verse. **That we might have hope** — not a wish, but confident expectation: the return of Jesus Christ and everlasting life with Him. That is why these accounts exist, and it is how they should be read.

Wash, and Be Clean

He had everything a man of his world could want. He was commander of the army of Syria, the most powerful kingdom near Israel. He had won great victories. The king leaned on his arm. He was rich, respected and brave.

"But he was a leper."

Four words at the end of a list of honours, and they undid all the rest. No army could defeat it. No money could buy it off. No king could order it away.

Help came from the last place anyone would look — a little Israelite slave girl, taken captive in a raid, who served in his house. She said there was a prophet in Samaria who could heal him. So the great general set out with a letter from his king, a fortune in silver and gold, and a train of horses and chariots, and pulled up at the door of a prophet's house.

The prophet did not even come out. He sent a messenger with a message: *Go and wash in the Jordan seven times.*

Naaman was furious. He had expected a ceremony worthy of his rank. Instead he was told to go and bathe in a muddy foreign river like a common man. He turned his chariot around in a rage.

It took his own servants to talk him down. And when he finally went down to the Jordan and dipped himself the seventh time, his flesh came back like the flesh of a little child.

This is the story of a proud man made clean by humbling himself — and of a God whose grace reached across the border to an enemy of His people. Jesus told this story in his hometown synagogue, and it nearly got him killed.

The Setting

When. The ministry of the prophet **Elisha**, Elijah's successor, in the northern kingdom of Israel — roughly 850–800 B.C. by the reckoning most often used. The king of Israel is not named in this chapter; he is most likely **Jehoram** (also called Joram), a son of Ahab, who reigned about 852–841 B.C.

The nations. Syria (Hebrew *Aram*), with its capital at **Damascus**, lay northeast of Israel. Syria and Israel were frequent enemies. Syrian raiding parties crossed the border to take plunder and captives. Only a chapter later, **"the king of Syria warred against Israel"** again (2 Kings 6:8).

Where.

- **Damascus**, the Syrian capital, watered by the rivers **Abana** (the modern Barada) and **Pharpar**, clear streams flowing down from the snows of Mount Hermon.
- **Samaria**, the capital of Israel, where the king lived and where Elisha had a house.
- **The Jordan River**, some twenty-five miles east of Samaria — a winding, often muddy river in the deep rift valley.

Who.

- **Naaman**, commander of the Syrian army.
- **A little maid** from Israel, a captive, who served Naaman's wife.
- **The king of Syria** — probably **Ben-hadad**, the name borne by several Syrian kings of this era.
- **The king of Israel.**
- **Elisha**, "the man of God."
- **Naaman's servants**, who spoke sense to him.
- **Gehazi**, Elisha's servant.

Leprosy. The Hebrew word *tsara'at*, translated "leprosy," covered a range of serious skin diseases — not only the disease now called leprosy (Hansen's disease), but other conditions that made the skin scaly, white or raw. Under the Law of Moses a leper in Israel was **unclean**, had to **"dwell alone; without the camp"** (Leviticus 13:46), and cried **"Unclean, unclean"** to warn others away (13:45). Even King Uzziah lived in isolation until his death when he became a leper (2 Chronicles 26:21). Syria had no such law, and Naaman still held his command — but his disease was incurable, and it could only grow worse.

The administration. The **Mosaic Law**, given to Israel. Naaman was a Gentile, outside the covenant, and an officer of Israel's enemy.

The Story, Told Faithfully

A Great Man — But

> **2 Kings 5:1** *Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honourable, because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria: he was also a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper.*

Look at the list: **captain of the host** — commander-in-chief. **A great man with his master** — high in the king's favour. **Honourable** — held in high regard, literally *lifted up of face*. **A mighty man in valour** — a proven warrior.

"But he was a leper." One word turns the whole verse. Every person, however great, has a "but." Naaman's was written on his skin.

"Because by him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria." This is remarkable. Naaman did not know the LORD. He was a general of a pagan nation that worshipped other gods. Yet scripture says that his victories were given to Syria by the LORD. The God of Israel was not the God of Israel only. He ruled the nations too, and had been at work in Naaman's life long before Naaman knew His name. (An old Jewish tradition says Naaman was the archer whose arrow, shot **"at a venture,"** killed King Ahab [1 Kings 22:34]. The Bible does not say so, and it remains only a tradition.)

The Little Maid

> **2 Kings 5:2** *And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:3** *And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy.*

"Gone out by companies." Raiding bands. They struck Israelite villages and carried off people and goods. On one of those raids they took **"a little maid"** — in Hebrew, *na'arah qetannah*, "a young girl, a little one." We never learn her name. She was torn from her home and her family and made a household slave in the house of the very man who commanded the army that took her.

She had every reason to be bitter. She could have been glad that her master was sick.

"Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" *If only my master could go to the prophet!* She wanted him healed. She called him **"my lord,"** served his household faithfully, and when she saw his suffering she spoke up with the one thing she knew.

"For he would recover him of his leprosy." Her faith was bold. Jesus later said that **"many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian"** (Luke 4:27). As far as the record shows, Elisha had never healed a leper. The girl had no example to point to. She simply believed that the God of Israel, through His prophet, could do it.

The whole story turns on one sentence from a captive child who kept her faith in a foreign land.

The Letter

> **2 Kings 5:4** *And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:5** *And the king of Syria said, Go to, go, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.*

The word of a slave girl reached the king. The king of Syria was eager: *Go — and I will write to the king of Israel.*

“Ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.” A talent weighed roughly seventy-five pounds. Ten talents of silver was some seven hundred and fifty pounds — a fortune. Six thousand pieces of gold on top of that. And ten sets of fine clothing, which in the ancient world were a form of wealth in themselves. Naaman came ready to pay whatever healing cost.

> **2 Kings 5:6** *And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.*

The king of Syria assumed that the power to heal would be in the palace. The girl had said *the prophet*; the king heard *the king*. Kings deal with kings.

“Am I God?”

> **2 Kings 5:7** *And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.*

“He rent his clothes.” Tearing one’s clothes was the sign of grief, horror or alarm.

“Am I God, to kill and to make alive?” The king was right about one thing: only God can do this. He echoed the words of the Law: **“I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal”** (Deuteronomy 32:39). But he did not think to turn to that God. He did not remember that there was a prophet of that God in his own capital.

“See how he seeketh a quarrel against me.” He assumed the worst: this was a trap, a pretext for war. The king of Israel saw only danger. The little maid had seen an opportunity for God.

“There Is a Prophet in Israel”

> **2 Kings 5:8** *And it was so, when Elisha the man of God had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.*

“Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes?” A gentle rebuke to the king. *Why panic? Have you forgotten who is in Israel?*

“He shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.” Elisha’s purpose was not to show off his own power, but to show Naaman — and the king — that the God of Israel was real and present, and that He spoke through His prophet.

At the Prophet’s Door

> **2 Kings 5:9** *So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariot, and stood at the door of the house of Elisha.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:10** *And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.*

Picture the scene. The great Syrian general, with his horses, his chariot, his retinue and his treasure, drawn up in front of a prophet’s house in Samaria.

“And Elisha sent a messenger unto him.” Elisha did not come out. He did not greet the general, bow to him, or even look at him. He sent word by a servant.

This was not rudeness for its own sake. As this series understands it, Elisha was dealing with Naaman’s pride from the first moment. Naaman had to learn that the healing did not come from Elisha, or from any ceremony, or from his own importance. It came from God, by His word, received by faith and obedience.

“Go and wash in Jordan seven times.” A plain instruction. No payment. No ritual performed by the prophet. Just go and do what God said.

“And thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” A promise attached to the instruction.

“Behold, I Thought”

> **2 Kings 5:11** *But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:12** *Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage.*

“Behold, I thought.” Here is the problem in two words. Naaman had already decided how God should heal him. He had it all pictured: the prophet would come out, stand before him with dignity, call on his God by name, wave his hand over the diseased place — and the leprosy would vanish. A performance worthy of a great man.

God did not do it Naaman’s way.

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” The rivers of Damascus ran clear and cold from the mountains. The Jordan was often brown and muddy. If washing was all it took, why travel a hundred miles to wash in *that*? It felt like an insult to his country as well as to him.

“So he turned and went away in a rage.” He was about to go home a leper — because the cure was too simple and too humbling.

The healing was not in the water of the Jordan. There was nothing special about that river. The healing was in doing what God said. And pride almost cost Naaman everything.

“My Father”

> **2 Kings 5:13** *And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?*

Once again, the humble people in the story are the ones who see clearly. First a slave girl, now his own servants.

“My father.” A term of deep respect and affection. They came to him not as critics but as people who cared about him.

“If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it?” Of course he would. If Elisha had told him to fight a battle, give a fortune, or go on a long pilgrimage, Naaman would have done it gladly. Great things suited a great man.

“How much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” *If you would have done something hard, how much more should you do something easy?* That is the whole point. Naaman was willing to *earn* his healing. He was not willing to simply *receive* it.

People are often the same with God. They would gladly do something great to be saved — give much, suffer much, work hard. What they find hard is to humble themselves and receive what God freely gives.

Seven Times in the Jordan

> **2 Kings 5:14** *Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God: and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.*

“Then went he down.” Down from his chariot. Down the steep banks of the Jordan valley. Down from his pride. Every step of this story is downward for Naaman — and downward is where he was healed.

“And dipped himself seven times.” Not six. The general who commanded armies obeyed a prophet’s servant exactly. Seven is the number of completeness in scripture. Each dip, as far as he could tell, changed nothing — until the seventh.

“According to the saying of the man of God.” This is the key. He did what God’s word said.

“And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child.” In Hebrew, *little child* here is *na’ar qaton* — the very same words, in the masculine, used for the *little maid* (*na’arah qetannah*) in verse 2. The great man became like the little girl who had pointed him to God. He had to become small to be made whole.

“And he was clean.” Not only healed, but *clean* — the word that mattered most under the Law. The uncleanness that set a leper apart was gone.

“Now I Know”

> **2 Kings 5:15** *And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came, and stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy servant.*

“And he returned to the man of God.” Naaman went back, a journey of some twenty-five miles, with his whole company. This time Elisha came out, and the general **“stood before him.”**

“Behold, now I know.” Before, it was *Behold, I thought* (5:11). Now it was *Behold, now I know*. Naaman’s thinking had been replaced by knowing.

“That there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” This is a full confession of faith from a Gentile. Not *the God of Israel is stronger than my gods*, but *there is no God anywhere else*. There is one God. It was exactly what Elisha had said he would learn: **“he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel”** (5:8).

“Take a blessing of thy servant.” A gift. The man who had been too proud to wash now called himself **“thy servant.”**

“I Will Receive None”

> **2 Kings 5:16** *But he said, As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he refused.*

“As the LORD liveth, before whom I stand.” The same oath Elijah had used (1 Kings 17:1). Elisha served the LORD, not the general.

“I will receive none.” Elisha refused all of it — the silver, the gold, the clothes. Naaman pressed him. He still refused.

Why? Because Naaman had to know that God’s healing cannot be bought. If Elisha had taken payment, Naaman could have gone home thinking he had purchased his cure — that it was a transaction between a rich man and a skilled healer. By refusing, Elisha made it clear: this was a gift from God, received freely. Jesus later told his disciples, **“cleanse the lepers … freely ye have received, freely give”** (Matthew 10:8).

Two Mules’ Burden of Earth

> **2 Kings 5:17** *And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant two mules’ burden of earth? for thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.*

“Two mules’ burden of earth.” Naaman asked to take two mule-loads of Israel’s soil home with him. In the ancient world people commonly believed a god was bound to his own land. As this series understands it, Naaman wanted to build an altar in Damascus on the soil of Israel, so that he could worship the God of Israel there.

His understanding was incomplete — the LORD is not tied to a patch of ground. But his heart was right. **“Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the LORD.”** A commander of Syria had turned to the God of Israel.

The House of Rimmon

> **2 Kings 5:18** *In this thing the LORD pardon thy servant, that when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon thy servant in this thing.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:19** *And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a little way.*

“The house of Rimmon.” Rimmon (also called Hadad) was the chief storm god of Damascus — the Syrian counterpart of Baal. His name may mean “thunderer.”

“He leaneth on my hand.” The king of Syria, perhaps elderly, leaned on his chief officer’s arm when he entered the temple. When the king bowed, Naaman, supporting him, would have to bow too.

Naaman already felt the conflict. He knew there was no God but the LORD. And his official duty would put him in the temple of a false god. He did not ask permission to worship Rimmon. He asked pardon for the outward bow his duty forced on him.

“Go in peace.” Elisha did not give him a lecture or a list of rules. He did not approve of idolatry; the Law was plain on that (Exodus 20:5). As this series understands it, Elisha recognised that this new believer,

going back alone into a pagan court, needed to grow, and he left that growth to God. It is a model of gentleness toward a young believer whose heart is right but whose understanding is still small.

Gehazi

> **2 Kings 5:20** *But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at his hands that which he brought: but, as the LORD liveth, I will run after him, and take somewhat of him.*

The story takes a dark turn. **Gehazi**, Elisha's own servant, had watched all that treasure go back up the road.

"Naaman this Syrian." Contempt in two words. To Gehazi, Naaman was just a foreigner — an enemy — and taking his money would be fair game.

"As the LORD liveth, I will run after him." Gehazi used the same holy oath his master had just used — to swear he would do the opposite of what his master had done.

> **2 Kings 5:21** *So Gehazi followed after Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well?*
>
> **2 Kings 5:22** *And he said, All is well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two changes of garments.*

"He lighted down from the chariot to meet him." The man who had once sat in his chariot waiting for a prophet to come out to him now got down from his chariot for a prophet's servant. Naaman had truly changed.

"My master hath sent me." A lie. Gehazi invented two visiting young prophets who needed help — a story designed to sound generous and holy. He even asked for a modest amount, so it would seem believable.

> **2 Kings 5:23** *And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:24** *And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.*

Naaman, grateful and generous, doubled it: two talents — about a hundred and fifty pounds of silver — so heavy it took two servants to carry. Near Elisha's house, at **"the tower"** (Hebrew *ophel*, a hill or fortified mound), Gehazi took the bags, hid them, and sent the servants away before anyone could see.

"Went Not Mine Heart with Thee?"

> **2 Kings 5:25** *But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no whither.*
>
> **2 Kings 5:26** *And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?*

“Whence comest thou, Gehazi?” A question that gave him a chance to confess. **“Thy servant went no whither.”** A second lie.

“Went not mine heart with thee?” God had shown Elisha exactly what happened — even the moment Naaman stepped down from his chariot. Sin that is hidden from men is not hidden from God. **“Be sure your sin will find you out”** (Numbers 32:23).

“Is it a time to receive money?” Of all times! Elisha had refused payment to show Naaman that God’s gift is free. Gehazi’s greed threatened to undo that lesson — to tell a new believer that the God of Israel’s prophets could be paid after all.

“And oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants?” Elisha read Gehazi’s heart. The silver was not the end of it. Gehazi was already planning how to spend it — land, flocks, servants. He wanted to live like a rich man on a gift God had given freely.

The Leprosy of Naaman

> **2 Kings 5:27** *The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever. And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.*

“The leprosy therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee.” Gehazi had taken Naaman’s silver. Now he took Naaman’s leprosy with it. What he coveted, he received, and far more than he bargained for.

“And unto thy seed for ever.” *For ever* here (Hebrew *olam*) means a long, indefinite time — his family line would carry it.

“A leper as white as snow.” The same description as Miriam when she was struck with leprosy for speaking against Moses (Numbers 12:10).

The story ends with a bitter reversal. The foreigner, the enemy, the proud Gentile, went home clean. The Israelite, the prophet’s own servant, who had seen God’s power up close, went out a leper. Being near the things of God does not make a man right with God. The heart does.

Where the Story Leads

To the Messiah

Jesus told this story — and it nearly cost him his life. In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus reminded his hometown that God’s prophets had been sent to foreigners when Israel would not receive them:

> **Luke 4:27** *And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian.*
> **Luke 4:28** *And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,*
> **Luke 4:29** *And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.*

Like Naaman at first, they could not stand being humbled. They were angry that God’s grace might reach a Gentile. Like Gehazi, they were near the things of God and missed them.

Jesus touched lepers. Elisha did not come out to Naaman. Jesus went further than any prophet: when a leper came to him, **"Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean"** (Mark 1:41). No one touched lepers. Jesus did.

The stranger who returned. Jesus once healed ten lepers, and only one came back to give thanks — **"and he was a Samaritan."** Jesus said, **"There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger"** (Luke 17:16, 18). Like Naaman, the foreigner was the one who came back and gave glory to God.

Healed by his stripes. Naaman was healed by the word of God. Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, bore sin itself: **"Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed"** (1 Peter 2:24). He was crucified, raised from the dead, and ascended to God's right hand.

The Jordan. The river Naaman scorned is the river where Jesus himself was baptized by John (Matthew 3:13). The Son of God humbled himself to go down into those same waters.

To the Grace Administration

Saved by grace, not by works. Naaman wanted to earn his healing — with money, with a great deed, with a ceremony worthy of his rank. God gave it freely, received by faith. So it is with salvation: **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"** (Ephesians 2:8-9). **"And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace"** (Romans 11:6).

Not by works of righteousness. Some have seen in Naaman's washing a picture of water baptism. The story itself makes its point about humble obedience to God's word. In the grace administration, the cleansing that saves is the new birth God works within: **"Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"** (Titus 3:5). The one who is in Christ **"is a new creature"** (2 Corinthians 5:17) — made new, like Naaman's flesh, *like a little child*.

Grace to the Gentiles. Naaman was a Gentile and an enemy, outside the covenant. Paul reminds Gentile believers that they were once **"aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ"** (Ephesians 2:12-13). And more: **"That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel"** (Ephesians 3:6). **"For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him"** (Romans 10:12).

God's gift cannot be bought. Elisha refused payment; Gehazi tried to profit from grace and was struck. When Simon the sorcerer offered the apostles money for the power to give the holy spirit, Peter answered, **"Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money"** (Acts 8:20). **"The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 6:23).

Beware of covetousness. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15). **"For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"** (1 Timothy 6:10). Gehazi pierced himself through.

Humility receives grace. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). **"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves"** (Philippians 2:3).

Faithful where you are placed. The little maid served faithfully in a foreign house and spoke the truth when it counted. Believers are told, **"whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men"** (Colossians 3:23). One word from a faithful servant can change a life.

To the Topic of Humility and Grace

- **Everyone has a "but"** — no one is beyond needing God.
- **God uses the least likely people** — a captive girl, a group of servants.
- **Faith speaks up** even from a hard place.
- **Pride expects God to act our way** — "Behold, I thought."
- **God's way is often simpler and humbler than we want.**
- **The power is in obeying God's word,** not in the water.
- **Obey fully** — seven times, not six.
- **Grace cannot be earned or bought.**
- **Knowing God changes us** — "now I know."
- **Be gentle with new believers.**
- **Greed can ruin even those closest to the things of God.**

The Main Takeaway

Naaman, the honoured commander of Syria's army — "but he was a leper" — heard from a captive Israelite slave girl that the prophet in Samaria could heal him; he came with a fortune and a royal letter, but Elisha did not come out, only sent word, "Go and wash in Jordan seven times"; Naaman stormed away in a rage because he had expected a ceremony and thought the rivers of Damascus were better, until his servants reasoned with him that if the prophet had asked some great thing he would have done it, "how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?"; he went down and dipped himself seven times, "and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child," and he confessed, "now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel"; Elisha refused all payment, but his servant Gehazi ran after Naaman, lied to take silver and clothes, and went out a leper — showing that God's grace is freely given to all who humble themselves, even Gentiles and enemies, and cannot be earned or bought.

- **God's grace reaches beyond borders.**
- **Humility opens the door to healing.**
- **God's way is simple; pride makes it hard.**
- **Do what God's word says, completely.**
- **God's gifts are free.**
- **Covetousness corrupts.**
- **One faithful witness can change a life.**

For Our Learning — The People

- **Naaman.** Commander of the Syrian army, honoured and brave, but a leper; healed after washing seven times in the Jordan; confessed that there is no God but the God of Israel.
- **The little maid.** An Israelite girl taken captive by Syrian raiders; served Naaman's wife; pointed him to the prophet in Samaria. Her name is never given.
- **Naaman's wife.** Her mistress, who passed on the girl's words.
- **The king of Syria.** Sent Naaman with a letter and gifts; probably Ben-hadad.
- **The king of Israel.** Probably Jehoram son of Ahab; tore his clothes in fear, thinking the letter was a pretext for war.
- **Elisha.** "The man of God," Elijah's successor; sent Naaman to the Jordan, refused payment, and exposed Gehazi.
- **Naaman's servants.** Called him "my father" and persuaded him to obey.
- **Gehazi.** Elisha's servant; lied to Naaman and Elisha to take silver and garments; struck with Naaman's leprosy.

For Our Learning — Customs and Orientalisms

- **Raiding bands** taking captives across borders.
- **Captives serving as household slaves.**
- **Leprosy** and its social and religious meaning; lepers in Israel set apart as unclean.
- **Letters between kings** carried by envoys.
- **Gifts of silver, gold and clothing** as payment or tribute; talents as measures of weight.
- **Changes of raiment** — fine garments as a form of wealth.
- **Tearing clothes** in alarm or grief.
- **Chariots and retinues** of great men.
- **Healers performing gestures** — waving the hand over the diseased place.
- **Servants calling their master "my father."**
- **The belief that a god was bound to his own land** — hence carrying soil home.
- **A king leaning on the arm of his officer** in public ceremony.
- **Bowing in a temple** as part of court duty.
- **Getting down from a chariot** to honour another.
- **Swearing "as the LORD liveth."**

For Our Learning — Figures of Speech

A figure of speech is a deliberate departure from the plain, ordinary way of saying something, used by God to add emphasis and feeling. These are the ones in this story:

- **Antithesis** — "a mighty man in valour, but he was a leper" (5:1).
- **Idiom** — "honourable" (5:1), literally *lifted up of face*; "Would God …!" (5:3), *O that …!*

- **Erotesis (rhetorical question)** — “Am I God, to kill and to make alive …” (5:7); “Are not Abana and Pharpar … better than all the waters of Israel?” (5:12).
- **A fortiori (argument from the greater to the lesser)** — “if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing … how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?” (5:13).
- **Paronomasia (word play)** — “little maid” (5:2) and “little child” (5:14), the same Hebrew words; “Behold, I thought” (5:11) and “Behold, now I know” (5:15).
- **Simile** — “like unto the flesh of a little child” (5:14); “a leper as white as snow” (5:27).
- **Idiom** — “before whom I stand” (5:16), whom I serve.
- **Metonymy** — “Went not mine heart with thee” (5:26), the heart put for the prophet’s inward knowledge given by God.
- **Polysyndeton** — “money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards, and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants” (5:26), piling up Gehazi’s hidden plans.
- **Irony** — the Gentile enemy goes home clean; the prophet’s own servant goes out a leper.

What the Bible Actually Says

- **“By him the LORD had given deliverance unto Syria”** — God was at work in a pagan general’s life.
- **The little maid was a captive** who wished her master well.
- **No leper had been cleansed** in Elisha’s day except Naaman (Luke 4:27).
- **Naaman brought a fortune** and a letter from his king.
- **The king of Israel panicked;** Elisha said, “let him come now to me.”
- **Elisha did not come out;** he sent a messenger.
- **Naaman was angry because he had expected something different.**
- **His servants persuaded him to obey.**
- **He dipped seven times,** and his flesh became like a little child’s.
- **He confessed there is no God in all the earth but in Israel.**
- **Elisha refused every gift.**
- **Naaman asked pardon for bowing in the house of Rimmon;** Elisha said, “Go in peace.”
- **Gehazi lied twice** to take silver and garments.
- **Gehazi was struck with Naaman’s leprosy.**

God’s Will and Intent

- **God’s mercy reaches every nation,** not only Israel.
- **God works through the humble and the overlooked.**
- **God wants people to know Him,** not just receive His gifts.
- **God humbles the proud in order to heal them.**
- **God gives freely** and will not let His grace be sold.
- **God is patient with young believers** who are still learning.
- **God sees the hidden sins of the heart.**

- **God was preparing the Saviour for Jew and Gentile alike,** Jesus Christ — crucified, raised, and ascended — by whose stripes we are healed and in whom all who believe are made new.