

## “When You Are Desperate for a Healing Touch- Naaman’s Baptism”



[Scriptures: 2 Kings 5:1-15](#)

### Summary

People in pain want help. Whether that pain is from emotional or physical scars. Jesus encountered people in pain all the time such as the man the leprosy and the sick servant of a Centurion in Matthew 8:1-13. These people were desperate. So was an Old Testament character by the name of Naaman. He was in need of healing. And he was healed in a rather unusual way. That way and that healing changed his life forever. This sermon will remind the hearers that God's ways are not our ways, but following them can change one's life forever.

### Introduction

Her name was Dorothy. During the first day of speech class, the teacher was going around the room, having the students introduce themselves. Each student was to respond to the questions "What do I like about myself?" and "What don't I like about myself?"

Nearly hiding at the back of the room was Dorothy. Her long, red hair hung down around her face, almost obscuring it from view. When it was Dorothy's turn to introduce herself, there was only silence in the room. Thinking perhaps she had not heard the question, the

teacher moved his chair over near hers and gently repeated the question. Again, there was only silence.

Finally, with a deep sigh, Dorothy sat up in her chair, pulled back her hair, and in the process revealed her face. Covering nearly all of one side of her face was a large, irregularly shaped birthmark – nearly as red as her hair. "That," she said, "should show you what I don't like about myself."

Here was a young lady devastated by her hideous birthmark. She was desperate for meaningful touch.

So was Naaman.

## I. The physical condition (vv.1-3)

Naaman was the "Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" of his day. The military leader of one of the region's most powerful nations, he was a definite candidate for Who's Who in the World. He was the cream of the crop, lived among the upper crust, and caroused among the elite. The Bible says, "Naaman, commander of the army for the king of Aram, was a great man in his master's sight and highly regarded because through him, the Lord had given victory to Aram. The man was a brave warrior . . ." (2 Kings 5:1). Did you hear those descriptive words? Don't we all want people to use them of us? Commander. Great. Highly regarded. Victorious. Valiant. Here was a man that had power, position, and prestige. He was successful. He was a winner. He was wealthy. He was a hero. He was respected. He was admired. He was envied.

"But" – a three-letter conjunction. That small word changes everything.

Notice how first one concludes. ". . . but he had a skin disease" (2 Kings 5:1). He could think about all of his accomplishments; he could enjoy his power and position and prestige; he could admire his home and his wealth; but they all seemed to vanish as he stared into the mirror each day. Each time he looked at himself there was something looking back that defined his life. He was a leper, and nothing could change that fact.

Consider Christopher Reeve. Movie star. Wealthy. Handsome. Winner of awards and honors. Respected, loved, and admired by adoring fans. But. Once he was known as Superman with the power to melt steel, leap tall buildings, and fly into the heavens, but now an aluminum wheelchair, earthbound, defines his life. He is a paraplegic, and presently nothing can change that fact.

The fact is Naaman was a leper. Leprosy was the AIDS of Naaman's day. Lepers were isolated and humiliated. They were outcasts – the original untouchables. They were forced to wear torn clothing and shout, "Unclean, unclean!" anytime they encountered an uninfected person. Leprosy was the most feared disease of the day. It was extremely contagious and, in many cases, incurable. In its worst forms, leprosy led to death. Granted, Naaman's leprosy was probably in its infant stage or a mild form. He had concealed it, but now his clothing would not cover it up. While people treated him respectfully, now nobody would touch him. The lack of touch hurt Naaman deeply.

Like Naaman and like Dorothy we, too, long for meaningful touch. Why is it that when I am away from my wife and child, I long for their embrace? Why is that we squeeze the widow's hand at her husband's funeral? Why is that we sympathetically pat the shoulder of the defeated athlete? Why do we bear hug a long-lost friend? Why is that we hold our babies? Why is it that when my daughter is sad, she says, "Hold me, Daddy"? Touch brings comfort. Touch conveys acceptance. Touch promotes health. Touch imparts wholeness.

Can you imagine stumbling through life without being touched? Without someone holding your hand when you are lost? Without someone rubbing your back when it is sore? Without someone slapping you on the shoulder for a job well done? Without being embraced after being gone on a two-week business trip?

Naaman did not have to imagine. It was reality. His leprosy was his birthmark.

By the way, what is your hideous birthmark? What is your leprosy? What problem are you trying to conceal? What hurt are you trying to cover up? What prevents you from getting close to other people? Where do you need to be touched?

We, too, like Naaman and Dorothy have our disfigurements. We, too, have become very proficient in covering up our problems. We, too, need God's healing touch. We, too, like the ol' spiritual says, "It's not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

## II. The prescriptive cure (vv. 4-12)

So what do we do? Where do we find help? Where do we go for healing? In a word, we go down. While down is contrary to the direction we are encouraged, challenged, and even rewarded to go in our world, down is the way we must go if we are to find healing. Down is the route we must take if we are going to feel the touch of God.

Notice the contrasts in Naaman's journey. Naaman, the commander-in-chief, finds direction through a captive servant – his wife's slave. Naaman, the conqueror, finds help in a conquered nation – Israel. Naaman, the highly regarded man, learns of his treatment from a lowly prophet – Elisha. Naaman, the wealthy and valiant soldier, is cured in a dirty river – the Jordan.

What can we learn from this downward descent?

A. We need people in our lives who look past our haughtiness to see our hurt. (v. 2–3).

Naaman's wife's servant had been taken hostage from an Aramian raid into Israel. Now she served in Naaman's home tending to his wife's every need. She was not intimidated by Naaman's power, position, or prestige. She saw his pain. Called it by name. Knew of a pain reliever. And told Naaman where he could find help.

B. We need humble people in our lives who look past us ...

... who look past our job titles, our bank accounts, our cars, and our houses – and see our loneliness and our need and our hurt. We need people who will touch us at our point of need. We need people who will call our problems like they see them. We need people who see our blind spots. We need people in our lives who love us enough to not let us make stupid mistakes.

M. Scott Peck, in *A Different Drum*, observes that lived honestly, life is a crisis – difficult, surprising, overwhelming.

I can attest. One time I was going through very difficult crisis – as if there were any other kind. I had about had it with one person at church that was attacking me unmercifully and untruthfully. This tension at church was creating stress at home and frustration in every area of my life. I was angry and upset. No, I was mad. I had lunch with a close friend and I splattered my anger all over him about the problems I was facing. Being the genuine, mature friend that he was, he let me erupt. I told him I was going to let someone have it verbally from the pulpit. Softly and tenderly, my friend questioned if that would be the best course of action. Tactfully and carefully he pointed out to me how destructive such an attack would be. He loved me enough to not let me make a stupid mistake. He touched me at my point of need.

C. We need people in our lives who will demonstrate the four C's of loving relationships.

1. Concern – speak the truth in love to us
2. Commitment – walk through the pain with us

3. Confidentiality – know the struggles are kept between us
4. Consistency – maintain regular contact with us

In practicing these steps these trusted partners are saying, "I believe the best in you. And, I'm going to help you become the best."

These relationships are our balcony people. Everybody has balcony people and basement people in their lives. Basement people drag you down. Balcony people lift you up. Who are the balcony people in your life? Who are the people that are pulling you up? Who are the people that believe the best about you and are helping you become your best? Who are the people that look beyond your outward appearance and see your inward hurt?

D. We need places in our lives that will provide us with safety and security. (vv. 4–5)

Israel was a conquered nation. To Naaman it was a second rate, third world country. What did it have to offer? Militarily it did not present much of a threat, but spiritually it provided refuge.

You've seen those homes in your neighborhoods that have a poster of a white hand on a red background that is positioned in their front windows. The sign indicates to lost and confused children that this is a place of safety. If they are in danger, the children know that if they can get to the home with the hand in the window they will find a touch of a caring adult that will protect them from harm.

We need those places in our lives. As a child, I had a fort in the woods in my back yard that was my safe place. It was a place for my imagination to run wild. A place that was impregnable to outside forces. As a teenager, there was a place along Anderson Creek near my home that felt safe. There I poured my heart out to God. I seemed to hear his voice. As an adult that safe place has become my church. Church is more than a building. It is a place to speak to God and to hear from God. And, if you are honestly seeking to feel the touch of God, you will discover it.

The nation of Israel is present throughout the Scriptures as a metaphor for the church. The church is a safe place. A place that gives a caring touch in an uncaring world. A place that provides sanctuary – protection and comfort from those that would seek to assault. A place that extends a supportive and, often times, healing hand to those in trouble.

Do you realize that we have people who come to our churches, to the altar, who do not get touched until they come to church next week and to the altar again?

Israel was a safe place for Naaman. But, before I leave this thought, I want you to notice that when Naaman first entered Israel he was in the right place, but speaking to the wrong person. He first went to the king of Israel, but the king could not help him. In fact, the king misunderstood his coming all together and thought Naaman was trying to pick a fight.

The fact is that many people come to the right place each Sunday – the church, but speak to the wrong person. They come to impress their friends with the money they have, to astound their classmates and pew mates with the clothes they wear, to amaze the pastor with the credentials they possess, and all the while miss the main event. They talk to their friends, to their classmates, even to the pastor. Don't misunderstand there is nothing wrong with talking with these people. It is right that we do. But, if that is all we dialogue with, we have missed talking to the right person – God. In fact, it is becoming increasingly easy in western Christianity to come to church and not pray a prayer to God, or sing a song to God, or hear a word from God. Christian worship has given away to religious theatrics. Entertainment has replaced experience.

By the way, do you talk to God when you go to church? He is the one who wants to heal you. To touch you. To scoop you in his arms and hug you.

E. We all need prophets in our lives who will point us to the cure. (v. 8)

So Naaman goes to Elisha in Samaria. Remember Samaria? If Israel were a second rate, third world country, Samaria would have been the armpit of the second rate, third world country. Samaria was despised even by the Israelites. When Naaman arrives at Elisha's dusty enclave, a far cry from Jerusalem's splendor, Elisha sends out his servant. Naaman had been remarkably flexible and amiable, willingly traveling out to the prophet's remote outpost to ask for the healing touch. But, when Elisha's servant shows up at the door with the instructions for the cure, he is incensed. Outraged. Ticked off. He's not only sweating bullets from the dirty, dusty desert; he is ready to spit bullets in the direction of Elisha.

Prophets have that effect on people. They don't beat around the bushes. They lack tact. They get to the point. They tell it like it is. They often times offend and insult. But they speak the truth. And when you are face to face with a disease that is going to take your life you have got to decide if you want comfort and convenience or a cure.

It is like visiting a gruff doctor who is a specialist for a potentially deadly disease that no other doctor seems to provide an answer, much less a cure. The doctor, long on knowledge, but short on bedside manners, pokes, prods, and probes. Finally, he addresses you with the tact of a doorknob. He has a treatment, a cure, and an answer for your condition. And isn't

that what you want, a cure?

Naaman almost rejected his opportunity for healing by getting angry that Elisha did not show up to greet him at the door. Elisha hadn't read his Emily Post Manners book for how to act when foreign dignitaries arrive. He may not have had tact, but he had a treatment. He may not have had compassion, but he had a cure.

Naaman was part of the 'pastor only crowd.' Some believe that they cannot be ministered to if the pastor doesn't do the ministering; they can't be prayed for if the pastor doesn't do the praying; or preached to if the pastor doesn't do the preaching; or visited if the pastor doesn't do the visiting.

Naaman was a big shot in his country and he wanted a big shot prophet to meet him at the door and heal him. He wanted this prophet to jump and shout and dance and put on a big show for his healing to occur. But, God does not always send blessings in the people we want and the vehicle we want. Often times, God chooses the lowly person through ordinary means to accomplish his healing.

Be careful if you are in the pastor-only crowd or the big shot-only crowd because God might send a servant to touch you and heal you. You may miss the blessing if you are looking the wrong way. Many have received the touch of God and the healing of his power but because it was not spectacular have attributed it to coincidence or logic.

F. We all need a prescription for our lives that will lead to a healing touch. (v. 10)

Elisha's prescription for healing was bizarre. "Go wash seven times in the Jordan and your flesh will be restored and you will be clean" (2 Kings 5:10V). Come on now, get real. Let me retrace Commander in Chief Naaman's downward descent. He receives instructions from a slave girl to go to conquered, forsaken Israel, to a lowly prophet that lives in the armpit of the second rate, third world country, who gives him instructions to go the dirty, dingy Jordan River and bathe not once or twice but seven times. In case you have forgotten your geography, the Jordan River, which means "the descender," flows through a rift valley. Its headwaters lie more than a thousand feet above sea level at the Sea of Galilee and its mouth nearly thirteen hundred feet below sea level at the Dead Sea. So to go to the Jordan River was to go down, way down.

"That's crazy," thought Naaman, "seven ducks in a dirty pond. Why, we have rivers in Aram that are better than the Jordan." Naaman doubted that God's prescription for healing could really do anything. Naaman did not realize that the power was not in the water, but was manifested in the water by doing what God says.

Healing always comes from doing what God says.

Naaman continued to doubt when he entered the Jordan and came up still a leper. God reminded him that when the Lord says seven, six would not do.

God is asking some of us to dip seven times. Humility leads to obedience. The humble person makes no claims on God, but knows that God has claims on him or her. When God asks for seven times, do not try to get by with only five or six. God wants us to go the distance, will we? God is not trying to tie conditions to his healing, but rather he is testing our obedience.

We must believe that God's way is better than our own. We may not always understand his way of working, but by humbly obeying, we will receive his blessings. We must remember that God's ways are best; God wants our obedience more than anything else; and God can use anything to accomplish his purposes.

### III. The prostrating compliance (vv. 13-15)

Why must Naaman, and you and I for that matter, descend downward in order to receive healing? Why must we have a compliant attitude toward God's instructions? Peter answers that question: "And all of you clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, so that He may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5-6). We have to scrape bottom before we can start up. We have to look at death before we can see life. We have to taste pain before we can experience joy. We have to humble ourselves to lowly places and lowly people before we can feel the hand of God lifting us up.

As long as God's arm is he chooses to touch us most when we walk humbly before him.

Naaman was that low. He finally humbled himself in complete obedience to the loving instructions of God's messenger. And in doing so he was touched by God and healed in a way that did not fix his expectations. "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" (2 Kings 5:14). If his leprosy defined his earlier life; it was God's healing touch that redefined his later life. Having experienced the grace of God he was changed, not only physically, but spiritually and vocationally. Naaman stood before Elisha and said, "I know there's no God in the whole world except in Israel. Therefore, please accept a gift from your servant" (2 Kings 5:15). Naaman went from a sick man to a healed man, an ungodly man to a godly man, a lost man



to a saved man, a great man to a gracious man, and from a commander of men to a servant. Here was a man that had felt the touch of God and was changed. Now and forever.

I need that touch. Do you? If we are honest with ourselves, we all desperately need the touch of God. Will you and I humble ourselves before God so he can touch us? Will you and I be obedient to his instructions so he can heal us?

## Conclusion

Which brings us back to Dorothy, the student in the speech class that showed the others the one thing she did not like about herself – her large, irregularly shaped birthmark that covered nearly all of one side of her face.

Moved with compassion, the godly professor leaned over and gave her a hug. Then he kissed her on her cheek where the birthmark was and said, "That's OK, Honey, God and I still think you're beautiful."

Dorothy cried uncontrollably for almost twenty minutes. Soon other students had gathered around her and were offering their comfort as well. When she finally could talk, as she dabbed the tears from her eyes she said to the professor, "I've wanted so much for someone to hug me and say what you said. Why couldn't my parents do that? My mother won't even touch my face."

Dorothy, just like Naaman, had a layer of inner pain trapped beneath the outward scars. She was desperate for a healing touch.

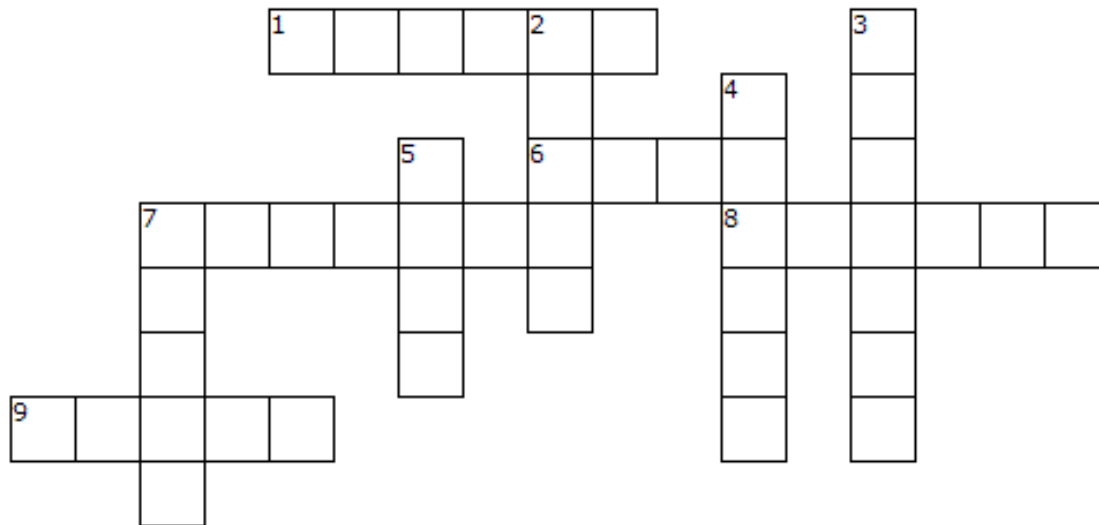
Are you desperate? When we get desperate, we will go to whatever lengths necessary to experience the touch and feel the grace, even when God says to humble ourselves by washing in a dirty river.

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# Naaman Healed of Leprosy

So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child's, and he was healed! 2 Kings 5:14

Based on 2 Kings 5:1-14



## ACROSS

1. The river where Naaman was told to dip
6. The one who told Naaman's wife about the prophet
7. Someone who serves in the army
8. The country where Naaman went for healing
9. How Naaman looked after dipping in the Jordan

## DOWN

2. How Naaman felt when he was told what to do
3. The disease that Naaman had
4. The prophet who told Naaman what to do
5. The person Naaman first went to for healing
7. The number of times Naaman was told to dip

JORDAN  
SEVEN

SOLDIER  
GIRL

ELISHA  
KING

ISRAEL  
CLEAN

ANGRY  
LEPROSY

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R I V E R F O A W A S H M B A  
 B N S F L Q H P L T C V T E K  
 H L W L E S V L T E D M S D S  
 A U J K I K R T E W P U W Q B  
 R R R L U I M P C T O R D S G  
 Q K E T D N G V Q H T Z O L J  
 W V D R Z G L A R M Y E K S Z  
 T S I F D C N C C Y K I R L Y  
 L P O C O G H A L C U H N H E  
 W J R L T I R A A E U T L O H  
 B B O O D O S Q R M A R U R M  
 E A F R P I R R R I A N E S K  
 B R C O D H E Y A H O N C E Y  
 F A A V D A E R X E G T M S N  
 U M S E V E N T U L L A S O X

ELISHA	VICTORY	LETTER	PROPHET	NAAMAN
ARMY	ARAM	CHARIOTS	CURE	ISRAEL
SOLDIER	KING	LEPROSY	CLEAN	HORSES
SEVEN	HOUSE	RIVER	WASH	JORDAN