

Bible Studies for Life Series for August 19: Handling discouragement

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When sickness strikes

- 2 Kings 5:1-5; 8-16

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I was 18 years old and bulletproof. It was my senior year in high school. The world was at my fingertips. Many years before, I had made a commitment to follow Jesus Christ, regardless.

On Sundays I worshipped God at Belmont Baptist Church in Pueblo, Colo. The sad truth of my life is that I had become a “secret service” Christian. I had managed to compartmentalize my life. On Sundays, my friends were church people. The rest of the week, I lived my life apart from God with the friends I made with my own winning personality. Sports and friends became my personal god.





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In the fall of 1975, I suddenly became ill. My illness started with a whimper—influenza. No big deal for an 18-year-old who was bulletproof and invincible. But the flu wouldn't go away. Each day brought a new and mysterious symptom. Until that point, I had only seen a doctor when the school required me to do so for a physical. Those days were over for Mr. Bulletproof.

The next year of my life I became all too familiar with the medical community. I won't bore you with all my details; you probably have your own. I will tell you that it took three months in 1975 for me to receive my diagnosis: Guillain-Barré Syndrome. Translation: French Polio. What began with a whimper now ravaged my weak and frail body. I lost all ability to walk because paralysis had taken over my body slowly and painstakingly.

In the words of the remarkable Presbyterian minister and chaplain to the U.S. Senate, Peter Marshall, God was tapping me on the shoulder. What would I do? Where could I turn? Would I be healed from this disease?

Our lesson this week seeks an answer to a question we have asked for ourselves or for a loved one: How can I know God cares for me when I'm sick?

Sickness can strike anyone (2 Kings 5:1-5)

In a few phrases in these verses, we learn Naaman was a remarkable man. Naaman was a high-ranking officer in the Syrian army. We might call him a four-star general. Scripture calls him "A great man with his master." Naaman was trustworthy and important. He garnered the respect of his fellow man. Naaman was secure, responsible, honorable and brave. Naaman was also very sick; he had contracted leprosy.

Leprosy is a serious skin disease that can begin with a mild form of foot fungus and can lead to skin lesions where the skin literally falls away from the body. Leprosy often has been referred to as the cancer or AIDS disease of the ancient world.

Naaman was strong, powerful, and influential, but with leprosy, he also was very vulnerable. How long could he keep his powerful position? How long would it be before the disease took such control that he no longer could lead other men? When we are sick we are faced with our own limitations.

Naaman searches for a prophet of God so that he can be healed. Naaman is desperate and needs a cure. God uses ordinary people along the way. A servant girl suggests a cure might be possible through God's prophet, Elisha. Naaman prepares and searches and finally finds God's prophet, Elisha.

In error, Naaman thought he could purchase God's healing. Surely God would be moved when he saw Naaman's resources, strength and prominence.

Naaman is in a bargaining mood with God. Could he buy his healing?

God's ways are not always understood (2 Kings 5:8-12)

Naaman is not the first person to seek an audience with God based on his

own credentials. Surely Naaman's wealth and prestige would gain this four-star general an audience with God or God's prophet. Naaman brought with him horses and chariots—surely God would be impressed! Of course, we know God is not impressed with Naaman's horses and chariots. God's ways are not always understood!

The scene is set. Naaman stands outside the prophet Elisha's house with his impressive collection of men and money. Instead of a personal audience with God or his mighty prophet, an unknown household servant peeks through the door, steps outside and gives him a most unusual message. In effect he says: "Elisha says to go dip in the river seven times and you'll be fine. Have a nice day!" The door shuts and the servant is gone.

The seasoned soldier stands speechless. His neatly-pressed uniform must have wrinkled along with his confused face. God's prophet didn't even bother to come to the door himself. God's prophet was seemingly unimpressed with Naaman's entourage. What a humiliating set of instructions he gave. Scripture tells us Naaman was furious.

Naaman expected God and God's prophet to take him seriously. Naaman also expected God and God's prophet to take his illness seriously. Naaman wanted to hear Elisha personally say, "Well this is going to take some doing, but I think we can motivate God to work in the way we ask him to."

Sound familiar? As we read these verses, we witness pride on parade. How often have we said, "I want God to work and move on my terms, in my way, according to my merit?" God's ways are different.

God's grace is available (2 Kings 5:13-16)

Naaman came dangerously close to missing out on God's power and healing. Naaman would have to abandon his own personal ways for the

ways of God. Was this strong and impressive general a big enough man to recognize his limitations? Could the general follow orders no matter how simple? Fortunately, in our passage, we are told that God uses ordinary people like Naaman's servants. They urge him to follow orders. Naaman, the general used to giving orders, proves he also can follow orders. He goes to the Jordan River and immerses himself seven times.

Naaman receives healing from God alone. The mystery and simplicity of Naaman's healing prompts us to praise God alone. No puff of smoke or loud trumpets playing. Elisha is not the source of God's healing, cleansing power. The water is not magical. God uses ordinary people.

In my life, I had to learn no one is bulletproof. When sickness comes, we value health. God used ordinary people in my own life—doctors, physical therapists and a desperate patient. I made God a promise when I was at my lowest. I promised God if he would let me walk again, my steps would move in his direction.

Ken Gire, in his book *The North Face of God*, says: "When suffering shatters the carefully kept vase that is our lives, God stoops to pick up the pieces. But he doesn't put them back together as a restoration project patterned after our former selves. Instead, he sifts through the rubble and selects some of the shards as raw material for another project—a mosaic that tells the story of redemption."

The only answer to Naaman's healing is the invisible and invincible Lord. In my experience, God alone always has been faithful.

Discussion questions

- Do you believe in healing?

- Why does God sometimes choose not to heal?
- What role does obedience play in this miracle?
- What have you learned from “God’s tap on your shoulder?”

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