

# 8 – “One Small Step” //

## Naaman // 2 Kings 5:1–18

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### Introduction:

I want to talk today about small decisions that have *massive* implications.

- I first met Veronica at a high school camp I was speaking at while I was in seminary. (She was a counselor, btw, not a high school camper.)
- I had first seen Veronica as she led worship one evening... and I thought she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. I called my parents that week, in fact, and told them I was pretty sure I had met the girl I wanted to marry. If I could just have a conversation with her now.
- I tried to talk with her 2–3 times that week but she was, to put it plainly, **rude to me**. Even getting up and walking away once.
  - A **less confident guy** would have assumed she wasn't interested; I just assumed she was nervous around me.
- Well, I had basically struck out all week long, and when the week ended it was time for me to go home and I was walking my stuff to the car to leave when I saw her standing up on the porch with some friends and I thought, “*I’m going to go up and try one more time.*” I remember standing there thinking: “You know, should I just cut bait?” I stood for a moment in indecision, and then dropped my stuff off in my car, turned around, and walked back.
- And the rest is, well, as they say, history.
- Sometimes I think about the massive implications of that small decision to go back. Seriously. And I almost didn't. How much my life has changed—Veronica says that the product you see today is nothing like the raw material she encountered in 1997; I've got 4 kids with her; she is one of the most defining elements of my life now.

- What would have happened if I *hadn't* turned around?

The point of that story is not, guys, that stalking a girl will always pay off. The line between confident and creepy is a subtle one, but it's very important.

I simply tell it to show you that a small decision, made with only the slightest glimmer of hope, had a massive implication.

And I tell you that because the main character in our final story in our Elijah/Elisha series made a small decision of faith that had massive implications. And I want to use his story to show you that there are small steps of faith that you can make that will have massive implications for you.

The biggest blessings in your life will come from small acts of obedience.

- One of mentors used to say: It's never the dreams you dream; it's the decisions you make. (small decisions)

### 2 Kings 5:1–18: the Story of Naaman

This story is probably my favorite story in the whole Old Testament. I'm serious. I love it more than David and Goliath; more than Daniel and the Lion's Den; more than Jonah and big fish.

- If you grew up in church, you've probably heard this story—you probably remember it presented on flannel graph...
- ...but if you didn't grow up in church, you've probably never heard it!

[5:1] Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria (some translations say 'Arameans': same thing), was a great (gadol—that word we studied a few weeks ago—mighty!) man with his master and in high favor, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. (victory over whom, btw? Israel) He was a mighty man of valor,

*...but he was a leper.*

- That's a huge but.
- Leprosy was the most feared disease in the world.
  - It began with a white patch of skin, like a rash, that would break out and then spread all over your body.
  - In time, your nerve endings deaden, bodily extremities would fall off, your hair fell out out, boils break out all over your body leaving gaping wounds of raw flesh, your facial features become grotesque.
  - Essentially, you turned into the walking dead.
- In those days, there was no cure. There was 100% death rate. And they believed it was highly contagious.

[2] Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel, and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.

[3] She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

[4] So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." [5] And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel."

So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.

- Scholars say this was an *enormous* sum of money! 750lbs. of silver and 150lbs. of gold!
- Clothing may seem an odd addition... Here's \$500,000, and some shirts... but clothing in those days was all handmade and very expensive.
  - And, plus, scholars say this would have been party clothing. Most people would never own a single set of clothes like this. Elisha's about to get 10 Jay-Z outfits just dripping with bling.

[6] And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, which read, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy."

[7] And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." (He think Syria is looking for an excuse for war.)

[8] But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, (Elisha, you see, lived pretty far from the seat of power)

...he sent to the king saying, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel."

- **Elisha perceived a bigger purpose in this leprosy**—he knew God had given it to Naaman so that Naaman might come to know God.

[9] So Naaman came with his horses and chariots (notice the *plural*, BTW. Do you realize what kind of **scene** this would have created? Remember, these Syrians had been **carrying out raids** against Israel for months.... The Israelites would not have been looking on in wonder, "Wow! Look at that cavalcade of Escalades... It must be somebody important." They would have been like, "Oh, snap. You betta **hide yo kids**; hide yo wife; hide yo husband because they be snatching yo people up...") **and stood at the door of Elisha's house.**

[10] And Elisha sent *a messenger* to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

- Elisha doesn't even go out to see him.
  - Elisha's house can't have been that big, just a little hut, Naaman could probably see him in there, but he sends out his assistant!
- How would you like to have been this kid? This would be like Vladimir Putin pulling up to my house in a cavalcade of tanks and F-15's and me sending out one of my interns to say, "I'm sorry, Mr. Putin. *Dr. Greear* has a busy afternoon and won't be

able to see you today (he can look in there and seem me watching TV)—but he said if you'll hike over to a river about 15 miles that way, strip down to your skivvies and slosh around a little in the mud, you'll be healed. Ok, gotta go."

[11] But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper.

- I thought there would be, like, a ceremony; we'd all sing Kum-ba-yah around the campfire for a few hours; I'd come out in a white robe, walk on hot coals... he'd do a dance and call down fire; I'd feel a warm, tingly glow on my skin...
- I don't even see him?

[12] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?"

- Those are two huge Syrian rivers. The Jordan was nasty little river, more like a creek. I've seen it.
- And another 15 miles out of the way.

So he turned and went away in a rage.

- Naaman is like the Meatloaf of the Old Testament: "I would do anything for healing, but I won't do that."
- Rage: *Heb.* Heat. This is starting to get dangerous!
- Naaman is like, "I know what he's trying to do. Get me out at this Jordan where there will be 10,000 laughing Israelites waiting to watch this whole thing so they can mock me when I don't get healed and tell stories for years about old Naaman."
- This is going to be bad for Israel! He's already planning his revenge.

[13] But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if it was a great word the prophet had spoken to you; would you not have done it? Has he only said to you, 'Wash, and be clean!'"

- In other words, "If he'd told you to get the berries off a plant at the top of Mt. Everest, or swim down the rapids of the rivers

and clip the toenails off a dragon, wouldn't you have done that?"

- All he told you is, "Go and wash!" What have you got to lose, Naaman—except your pride?

(Summarize) [14] So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

- I wonder how long Naaman looked at that spot.

**Now this is probably the best part:** [15] Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said... (Stop, stop!)

- Naaman is meeting Elisha for the first time, right? He's only talked to assistants up until now.
- What would you say to a man who had just saved your life that you were just meeting for the first time? "Thank you for healing me! You saved my life..."

"Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."

- Not the first mention of leprosy!
  - Do you **remember what Elisha** had said? "God gave him this leprosy so that he could know that there is a God in Israel."
- Naaman wasn't looking for God; he was looking for a cure for leprosy. **But God used his search for a cure to lead him to something even better than the cure for leprosy.**

Listen: what if God, in *your* pain, had something for you beyond—better than—the cure for your ailment? What if it was something so valuable that after you found it you'd forget to even mention the healing?

**Let me take off all the "what ifs."**

- I've learned that all of us—even the most together of us—have a few problems that we'd rather just **keep covered**. On the outside, everyone thinks you have it all together: you're

successful... and half the time you believe that too, but then there are these areas of brokenness:

- a **secret habit** you can't break;
- a **problem** you can't resolve;
- something **in your past** you can't shake.
- A **deep unhappiness**, invisible to everyone else that is rotting you.
- A **secret, paralyzing** fear
- Or maybe you've come up against an obstacle you feel powerless to overcome—a **health** setback; the **loss of a loved one**; you've **lost your job**.
- What if God's purpose in that problem is to get you **to ask a bigger question? A question so big** that when you get it answered it makes the problem you're dealing seem **so trifling** you almost forget to mention it?
- **What if God was his own greatest reward**—he was the pearl of great price, the treasure hidden in the field whose value was so great that in light of him you'd let everything else go and even forget to mention it?
- *(I'm not trying to give you this weekend a full answer to the question of why God allows us to suffer. Some people's suffering is not connected at all to sin in their life—I'll show you that in just a minute.*
- *I just want you to at least consider the question, if you never seriously have, of whether God might have a bigger purpose for you in it.)*

**The point of this story is not that every leper who heads out to the Jordan River will find healing for leprosy.** The point is to show you how sinners find God, or better yet, how God finds sinners.

*(But, before I unpack that, let me show you how the story ends... too good. So Naaman said:*

**"Accept now a present from your servant."**

[16] But he (Elisha) said, "As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none." Naaman urged him to take it, but he refused.

- A **fabulously rich guy** wants to give a gift to a pastor, but he refuses? I don't know of any other situation in which that has ever happened. It's never happened here.
- ***But Elisha knows that to receive this gift might confuse everyone watching.*** Remember, Naaman had started this process thinking he could purchase this miracle with his riches, and if he ended up giving the gift, even in gratefulness, it might lead people to assume he *had been able* to purchase it...
- ***...and the one thing that must be understood about the gospel is that it is a free gift of grace.***
  - The false **religion of man** says, "God, I'll do certain things for you and then you'll owe me."
  - The **gospel from God** recognizes salvation is a gift and then says in response, "God, **I owe you** everything."

[17] Then Naaman said, "If not, please let there be given to your servant two mule loads of earth, for from now on your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to any god but the LORD.

- (That's quite a jump, isn't it? "If you won't take my million dollar offering, can I at least have a couple of wagonloads of dirt? A cup of dirt.")
- Scholars say he's going to spread it out underneath him whenever he sacrifices.
- That is never commanded in the Bible... he just made that up! Seemed right to him.

*Oh, but it gets better.*

[18] In this matter may the LORD pardon your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, leaning on my arm, and I bow myself in the house of

Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.”

[19] He said to him, “Go in peace.”

- What? At first, I struggled with this... what is the meaning?
- Here’s the point: Naaman’s obedience is imperfect, but it’s a start. And God receives it.
- **I think a lot of Christians forget this.** They talk like you come to Jesus and then “bam!”—You automatically become a Spirit-filled, radical, mature Christian; your relationship with your wife is perfect; gangsta rap music on your Ipod suddenly transforms into harp music.
- Not true: you start out as a baby. You **crawl** and **drool** and **run into** stuff and **break** things.
- And that’s ok. Because you are coming the right direction.
- **God is a compassionate father.** *If you’re serious about repentance, he’s **serious about having you**, regardless of what shape you’re in.*

Alright—let me draw out for you the bigger point of this story. Naaman’s story tells us how each of us meet God.

I’ll show you two things:

- *Why Naaman came to God*
- *How Naaman came to God*

### I. Why Naaman came to God

- Let’s think about Naaman for a minute. Naaman was the ultimate insider, was he not? He had it all!
  - A successful **general, prime minister** (“on the kings’ arm”), **celebrity** (“highly regarded”), etc.
- *He’s the ultimate insider, but he’s about to become the ultimate outsider.*
  - Leprosy could put you on the outside like nothing else could. It stripped you of your strength, your beauty, and when people discovered you were a leper they put you

literally outside the city because they didn’t want to catch the disease.

- In Israel you had to shout “unclean” whenever someone came near.
- Leprosy was a sentence of banishment and death. It was the spot of death.
- But Naaman would never have found God if it hadn’t been for that spot. his spot of death became his portal of life.
- *Question: Do you have a post? Something that feels like a sentence of death?*
  - A need you can’t overcome: in your marriage, children
  - A habit you can’t break (people who have it altogether)
  - Guilt (Lady Macbeth: out damned spot!)
  - Fear of something that paralyzes you?
  - A dull unhappiness
  - Thoughts of your own mortality
  - A health scare
  - *Several years ago I knew a professional athlete that was in an accident...*
- Maybe your “spot” is that you really want to be a part of the inner ring, like Naaman was, and you can’t get in.
  - Lewis, “*The Inner Ring.*” We all establish a ring.
    - We are either trying to get into the ring and stay into (nothing feels worse than being kept out), or self-righteously criticizing those who want to be in.
    - This is every high school student: trying to be cool in some circle, or sitting on the sidelines disengaged and disgusted with those who are playing the game.
  - **The reason we crave to be in on the inside**, Lewis said, is that instinctively we know we are on the outside.
    - **Eden: nakedness!** If you’re naked, you’re on the outside!
- **The ultimate spot on our souls is sin, and the ring we are excluded from is God’s.**
  - Leprosy is so much like sin, which is why it’s talked about so often in the Bible. Sin deadens. Grows in you

and corrupts you more and more over time. You lose feeling.

- **Your soul has a disease, and it is *terminal!***
  - The **wages of sin** is death...
  - It is **appointed unto man** once to die, and after the judgment, and **there is none righteous**, no not one. We have **all chosen our own way**; we have all become **unprofitable...** and **death has spread** to us all because all have sinned."
- The lesser "spots" in our life may be there to point us to the greatest spot: the terminal spot of sin and condemnation on our souls.

## II. How Naaman came to God: *3 things he had to have to get to God*

### 1. A Searching Humility

*Did you notice throughout the story that Naaman keeps trying to go to kings but God keeps giving all his messages to him through slaves?*

- A **Hebrew servant girl** (who is the absolute lowest of the low in Syria: *Hebrew, servant, female, child*) tells him where to be healed.
- She says go not to the mighty doctors in Syria, but to **Elisha, the prophet of the despised, weaker** people.
  - Instead, he goes to his king, who goes to Israel's king.
- When he finally gets to Elisha, he is greeted by an **assistant**.
- After he rejects this prescription, **Naaman's servants** finally persuade him to believe.

Naaman shows up with a **mass of money and power** that few people in his day would have been able to put together.

- Elisha **dismisses it** out of hand: says, "Don't **want it**; don't **need it**; won't do **you any good**."

Elisha tells him to go **dip in a muddy creek 7 times**, and Naaman says, "I want to swim one of the mighty rivers in Syria."

What is the message?

- God does not save through the strength of men.
  - *Your money, your strength, and your power are worthless to God.*
- God saves by grace through faith.
  - Salvation is not found in our ingenuity; or in the indomitable spirit of man; our achievements; our science, or our education.
  - It's found in a **despised man** we thought so little of we crucified him.
- The cross **destroys our pride**.
  - **God's verdict** on our lives was death. The verdict over your life was death.
  - The cross shows us we were **powerless to save ourselves**. There was **nothing we could do** to help or contribute. All that we contributed to our salvation was our sin. God did the rest.
- For most people what keeps them from the gospel is the humility it requires to admit that this is the verdict on our lives and we are powerless to do anything about it!
  - Miles: backpack
- ***Do you have the humility to come to Jesus?***
- ***Straight up question to the cynic here:*** Think about how much humility it took for Naaman to cross that border... we are the mighty Syrians, but healing comes from someone in that backwoods, despised race?
  - Maybe this is where you are: you never thought you'd be in a place where you'd read the Bible, but you're here, and it's bothering your pride... You look around and think, "**A lot of you people aren't like me! I'm educated differently.**"
  - Maybe God is doing the same thing to you. **Do you have the humility and courage** to *question your convictions*, to *consider these things* with an open mind!

*This second element involves a character you probably overlooked; a character in this story so subtle that you probably hardly noticed her, but who is arguably the most important character is this whole story.*

## 2. A Suffering Servant

- [2] “Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl (indicates aged 12–14) from the land of Israel...
  - Can you imagine the horror?
    - She was a victim of human trafficking
    - If she was “taken,” her family was (at best) taken captive and sold somewhere else; at worse they had been killed.
  - She’s not suffering because of her sin. Her suffering has a different purpose.
  - ...and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife.”
    - Well, who does that indicate probably conducted the raid? *Naaman*. After all, he was the captain of the army.
  - But she seems, remarkably somehow, to have forgiven Naaman.
    - She doesn’t say, “*Ha! The old goon’s got leprosy... Serves him right. God is giving him what he deserves. Now I get to watch his decrepit old body fall apart and die.*”
    - She even speaks about him with tenderness. [3] “**Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.**”
    - Somehow, a little 14 year old girl had the faith to say, “*I’ll let God be God and be the judge who makes things right and I’ll forgive Naaman.*”
  - She was suffering, through no fault of her own.
    - If anything, her suffering was caused by Naaman’s sin.
    - **But her suffering became his salvation.**
  - **If you are saved, you will be saved by a ‘Suffering Servant.’**
    - This **sweet, little, unnamed girl** gave us one of the clearest OT pictures of Jesus.
    - Jesus suffered, **like this little girl.**

- Like her, it was **not his own sin** he suffered for, but ours.
- But unlike her, he entered into that suffering **voluntarily**:
  - She had **no control** over her circumstances. She’d been **involuntarily** stripped from her parents.
  - Jesus left his father voluntarily. ***No man took his life from him; he laid it down of his own accord.***
- This girl was **just a girl**.
  - Jesus was the **prince who ruled** the universe, who chose to become a slave. ***Though he was in the form of God...***
- This girl **simply told Naaman** about Elisha who told him about the river.
  - Jesus spilled his blood to **become the river** in which we could bathe and wash our sins away.
  - **Matthew 3:15** John the Baptist was baptizing in the Jordan River. His baptism was called a “baptism of repentance,” which meant you would come, confess your sins, and be baptized showing God was cleansing you. Jews, Roman soldiers, and sinners of all stripes were coming to him. One afternoon, Jesus stepped into the water, requesting baptism. John objected, understandably: “*Why do you need to undergo a ‘baptism of repentance?’*” Great question! Jesus have nothing to repent of? He had never sinned! Jesus answer: “Do not resist me, for I am doing this to fulfill all righteousness. Think about that phrase, “fulfill all righteousness.” Whose righteousness would that baptism fulfill? *Jesus’* righteousness was already fulfilled, and could not be any fuller! It was *my* righteousness he was fulfilling.
- **Imagine if you had had to wear your sins** on your chest like a nametag: your name, and all that you had done. Jesus as he walked to the water was taking those nametags off one by one

- and putting them onto himself and going into the water to repent of all our sins in our place.
- **And then, on the cross, he would die for our sins**, spilling his blood to *become the river that washes us white as snow.*

*“There is a fountain filled with blood,  
drawn from Emmanuel’s veins;  
and sinners plunged beneath that flood,  
lose all their guilty stain!”*

### 3. A Simple Act of Obedience

- Naaman had only to believe and submerge himself to be healed.
  - You and I have only to trust in Jesus.
  - *For God so loved the world...*
- Naaman came up with skin like a baby.
  - *If any man be in Christ...*
- **You have a terminal disease!** It’s sin. The answer is Jesus. Repent and believe.
- The Bible says that to symbolize your choice to follow Jesus, you should **be baptized**...
  - **Picture** of going in the water.
  - People say, but...“**Not that important.**” Don’t you hear the arrogance of Naaman in that?
    - *Your baptism becomes a marker* that God uses to open a portal of blessing your life!
    - *Nothing magical about the water, but God uses an act of obedience to open up a channel of blessing.*
    - The greatest blessings come from small acts of obedience!
- Believers, there will be **other small ways God is telling** you to obey. Maybe an area now in which God has been commanding you and you and he are wrestling.
  - Stopping something God has commanded

- Or telling you to **start something** else.
  - **Give** and be generous.
  - **Joining the church** or a small group.
  - Starting a **new ministry**.
  - Maybe **sharing Christ** with someone.
    - Like the *servant girl*, to share Christ with someone in power! But you’ve been scared. What if you held the key to someone’s salvation?

There is a world of blessing that comes only from obedience.

- **John 14:21**, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*

You obey, like Naaman, and it will open up a whole new world!

### Conclusion (Music):

Now is time to obey.

- Need to be saved? Prayer.
- Need to be baptized? Check card.
- What else is the HS telling you to do?