

In the Middle: Naaman
04.30.2023

This morning we are going to begin a new series we are calling “In the Middle”

Explain series

When you follow Jesus, you start a journey. One where you are walking in obedience to where He leads, and it’s in that time along the way when we experience hardship, doubt, worry, etc. however it’s also in that journey, which always continues, where we experience incredible growth and life change.

This morning we are looking at the story of a military leader named Naaman.

Open up your bibles to 2 Kings 5. We will start in verse 1

“Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.”
2 Kings 5:1

Verse one teaches us a lot about the man we are focusing on today, but we need to read between the lines to realize a few important parts of his character:

- Commander of the army of King Aram:

This means he was a high up military leader. Not for Israel though, for King Aram.

“Aram” is the Hebrew designation for “Syria” for the nation of Syria. At this point in history, Syria and Israel had faced off and battled on multiple occasions.

In fact, it was King Arab who is notorious in history for his hand in the death of one of Israel’s Kings: King Ahab.

So, we are focusing in on Naaman, a person who is a military leader of a nation that is NOT Israel.

- He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the Lord had given victory to Aram.

This shows us that while a lot of us think God only interacted and worked with the nation of Israel, the reality is He has His hand in, and is working through different nations and places in the world as well.

Naaman had been used by God before, but he probably didn't recognize that. Scripture is clear that the Lord used Naaman to deliver victory, but Naaman probably didn't know the God of Israel, the one true God.

- He was a valiant soldier

This is also worded in scripture as "he was a man of valor"- this is a big title, and an important one. There are only so many people in scripture who are considered men of Valor. This list includes Gideon in the book of Judges, and also King David. Naaman is the only gentile (non-Hebrew) described as a man of valor.

At this point the life of Naaman looks extremely good. We'll valued by his work, strong and capable, a man of valor. As much as Naaman had going for him there was one substantial thing working against him.

- But he had leprosy

Explain leprosy

This was a massive detour in the life and expectations of life Naaman had for himself. A massive detour.

Continue in verse 2-3

"Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.""

2 Kings 5:2-3 NIV

TANGENT

Let me pause here a moment and highlight how much I love students- and students don't miss this. This girl was a slave in a nation that was not her own; but God used her to tell Naaman about the prophet who could bring him to healing. This isn't the point of the overall sermon, but this girl who mourned the loss of her parents and family, who was somewhere she didn't want to be, said through her actions "God I want to be here".

I saw a clip from Kyle Idleman the senior minister at southeast and he said this:

When we are on a detour in our lives we all want to ask how this is happening, like a reason behind tragedy or "detours" would help, It won't. So instead of asking God what's the reason for this, we should be asking "God what is your purpose in this?" – or "God what are you trying to teach me in this" because then we find worth in the detour."

This young girl went from safety to slavery, and instead of crying out why me, she cried out "what now" and God used her in a massive way.

If you find yourself in the middle. If you find yourself not knowing where you should go or what you should do, stop dissecting how you got here and start dissecting WHY you got here. God will use that for something big, but ask Him and lean into Him.

END TANGENT

In the same way as this girl however, Naaman and his leprosy diagnosis was a major detour in his life, one he didn't know what to do with yet. So, with the advice from his servant girl, here is what he did next:

"Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing."

2 Kings 5:4-5 NIV

So Naaman goes to his King, the king of Syria and tells him of the prophet in Israel, and Aram gives him a recommendation letter. Naaman left and got a LOT of

money, maybe not all of his money, because he made a lot, but a undeniably large amount of money, and he makes his way to Israel to see the King of Gods people.

If we stop right here- Naaman has no idea what Gods ultimate purpose is, he doesn't even know for sure that the God of Israel, the One true God is exactly that. He has a diagnosis that will leave him dead, and one hope in seeking out a prophet.

Naaman goes to Israel and he meets the King

“As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, “Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!””
2 Kings 5:7 NIV

We see here that the King Jeroboam wasn't having it.

“When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: “Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel.””
2 Kings 5:8 NIV

So Naaman heard of a prophet from a slave girl from Israel, went to his king, who went to another king, who now is taking offense to his search for the prophet, then the prophet shows up. I'm sure that at this point Naaman is beyond frustrated.

I wonder if at the point in Naaman story after he has talked to a girl, 2 kings, and now has one angry, if he is thinking: maybe I should have just gone to find Elisha without the kings?

Naaman is communicating a need and he keeps meeting obstacles and more steps and people on a list.

He is right in the middle of a complicated situation, and he wishes it could just be simple.

-Meijer's story-

I think like me and that guy, Naaman is exhausted by this process and just wishes he could cut to the chase. Remember he has a disease that is killing him slowly and painfully. He wants to skip the middle and get to the miracle.

So many of us find ourselves in the middle of our journey. The hard part. And all we want is to skip the middle and get to the miracle.

But Naaman, just like us, doesn't know important things God is doing through his journey.

Elisha and the King of Israel are at odds here. Elisha wants the king to follow the one true God. So, by telling the King "have the man come to see me and he will know there is a prophet in Israel" he isn't saying that so Naaman knows there is a god in Israel. He is saying that so the King knows.

This super mundane, annoying step for Naaman, one he is probably asking God "why are you doing this to me" is being used for someone else's journey.

That can be how it works for us too, even when we don't understand the big picture.

God does His best work in the middle.

Keep reading with me in verse 9

"So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.'"

2 Kings 5:9-10 NIV

Imagine after all of this drama, all of these steps, all of this journey, you get to the prophet's house and he doesn't even come out to see you. All he does is send a servant. If Naaman wasn't angry before, he sure is now.

Here is what he says –

““But Naaman went away angry and said, “I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn’t I wash in them and be cleansed?” So, he turned and went off in a rage.”
2 Kings 5:11-12 NIV

Naaman is ready to leave. He has had enough.

There are a lot of people, students, leading men and women, church attendees, followers of Jesus, who have walked away from faith and the church for the same reason Naaman wanted to leave in this moment:

Naaman set expectations on the what God should do.

“I thought that he would...”

That’s the mark being missed right there.

Naaman, because of his title and wealth, is used to getting everything he wants, when he wants it, and exactly as he wants it.

Sound like anyone you know?

In a culture where I can get anything on Amazon in 1-2 days, or even within 5-10pm later today, I think we all can have a tendency to get a bit ahead of ourselves.

Keep reading with me

“Naaman’s servants went to him and said, “My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, ‘Wash and be cleansed’!” So, he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.”

2 Kings 5:13-14 NIV

Talk about the 7 times and how hard that would be

“Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant.” The prophet answered, “As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.”

2 Kings 5:15-16 NIV

Naaman didn't just find a physical healing on the other side of end of this part of his story, but a spiritual healing as well.

Naaman found the way out of that awkward, painful middle but only when he overcame parts of himself that were keeping him from moving the from the middle to the miracle.

1. Pride

a. Explain

2. Presumptions

a. Explain

3. Patience

a. Explain

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Hebrews 12:1b-2

Closing