

July 6th, 2025

2 Kings 5:1-14 — “How to Accept a Blessing”

Wow, here we are in 2 Kings, and there’s nothing here about Elijah calling out King Ahab or Jezebel or anything like that. In fact, the story starts out with, “*Naaman, commander of the army of the king of (Err-Am) Aram, was a great man and in high favor with his master, because by him the Lord had given victory to Aram.*” Aram is modern-day Syria, if you’re into geography. Ahab’s time in the spotlight ends in 1 Kings 22 when he dies in the battle of Ramoth-gilead. All things good or bad must come to an end I suppose. It was fun while it lasted.

2 Kings starts out with Elijah transferring his role as prophet of Israel to Elisha who, quite honestly, isn’t as interesting as Elijah. I take that back—he’s interesting in a *different* way than Elijah was. Elijah was a superhero prophet who dealt with depression, but he had a highly visible ministry out on the front lines. Elisha was interesting because the author of 2 Kings portrays him as kind of a grumpy crank.

Back in chapter 2, there’s a story about how Elisha was on the road between Jericho and Bethel when a large group of boys made fun of him for being bald. His response was... unconventional. Check this out—he cursed the boys, and two bears came out of the woods and mauled

them. Now, what's the lesson we're supposed to learn here? "Don't mess with the bald guy?" I mean, I know a little something about kids making fun of bald guys—I raised three of them. But wow. That's extreme. If it were me, maybe I would have cursed *them* with male pattern baldness! But I'd keep the bears in the woods.

Anyway, what we have in front of us this morning seems to be a lesson on "sometimes life isn't fair." And if that doesn't sound very exciting, maybe it's because we face this every day. I don't know about you, but I can maybe only think of a handful of days where everything went according to my plans. Now, I can think of plenty of times where that was *almost* the case, but something inevitably happened that wasn't a part of the original plan.

Maybe it's something big like, "I missed my flight from Denver to Sacramento and had to grab a later one," or maybe it's something small like, "Cozy Diner ran out of the cinnamon swirly bread they use to make French toast." Both involve making simple choices to compensate for an inconvenience. It's not enough to ruin the day, but it's just a reminder that we don't always get what we want—and a few glitches along the way don't necessarily make for a "bad day."

On the other side of this, what happens when there's a series of back-to-back annoyances followed by something

big, like blowing a tire on the first day of vacation? We call those “bad days,” even though *some* good things may have happened too. The bad experiences stick to us more than the good. Some people say it’s a matter of expectations and whether we choose to let things ruin our day. We can choose to be like Eeyore and walk around with a dark cloud over our head expecting tragedy, or we can choose to be annoyingly and toxically positive. At least that’s how we think it is.

What we don’t often take into consideration is that even on these predominantly bad days, there are good things that usually happen. Now, let’s throw in something that might skew the equation. What happens when you’re dealing with chronicity? And by that, I mean: what happens if you have some affliction that affects you negatively every day, like a chronic illness?

That’s what’s going on in this story about Commander Naaman. Naaman suffered from leprosy. He had to contend with a humbling negative that affected him daily. He also doesn’t seem to have any hope that he could be healed—because once you have leprosy, it only gets worse as time goes on.

In this case, Naaman is given an opportunity to be healed. And it’s not in a big dramatic way like other stories in the Bible. There’s no Moses here to raise his walking stick to

part the Red Sea. There's no Elijah to stand up against the powers of Ahab. There's no Jesus to cast evil spirits into a herd of swine and send them over a cliff to drown in the sea. What we see here is God working through a frustratingly long process that involves plain, ordinary people.

This is not an exciting story. This is not one that would have had me sitting on the edge of my seat in Sunday School. Honestly, I wish there were some big, dramatic event that healed Naaman—but instead we get this succession of events that involves a slave girl, the King of Israel, a prophet's errand boy, and a bath in the Jordan River. I'm looking for some special effects here. Give me thunderbolts and lightning! Give me some glowing auras or something with a little more pizzazz than, "*Go dip yourself in the Jordan River seven times.*" That would have put me to sleep in Sunday School. Heck, it might put you to sleep today—maybe you're already asleep. Wakey-wakey! This is going to be a subtle lesson where we'll have to go inward. There are basically four parts or stages to this story.

Stage One:

A slave girl tells Naaman's wife that there's a prophet in Samaria named Elisha who could heal Naaman's leprosy. We don't know the slave girl's name. The only thing we know about her is that she is an Israelite and was captured

by the Aramean army during a raid in Israel. She's not there of her own free will. She's more property than person, and for that reason, you'd think she'd be bitter and angry.

But she tells Naaman's wife, her mistress, that it's too bad Naaman didn't know about Elisha—Israel's prophet—because Elisha could maybe cure his leprosy. Why did she have compassion for someone who kidnapped her and made her a slave? I mean, in all likelihood, Naaman's army may have killed her family. And yet here she is: the voice of divine possibility. Here she is, representing truth, compassion, healing, and faith. This is strange. It's not very exciting, but it's weird because it defies expectations. It defies logic.

Stage Two:

Naaman goes to his king and says, "You wouldn't believe what I just heard. There is a prophet in Israel who might be able to cure my leprosy." Since Naaman was such a valuable asset to the Aramean army, the king says, "I'm going to send you to the King of Israel and see if he'll help you find Elisha. I'll send you a letter and some treasure to sweeten the deal."

By the way, the King of Israel at the time was Joram—Ahab's son. Can you imagine the trauma this guy must have had growing up? He has a lot of baggage, and it

shows. When he receives the letter and the treasure, the first thing that crosses his mind is, “This has got to be a trap! Aram is up to something! They want to invade Israel—I just know it!” He tore his clothes and said, “*Am I God, to give death or life, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Just look and see how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!*” If the slave girl represented truth, compassion, healing, and faith in this story, King Joram represented fear, paranoia, and a complete lack of faith in God.

Stage Three:

Elisha hears about Naaman’s visit and Joram’s freak-out. He sends a message to the king: “*Why are you being this way? Just send Naaman over to me so he can see there’s a prophet in Israel.*” So Naaman goes to Elisha’s house with horses and chariots—which isn’t unusual for the commander of an army. He wants to show off his status and power. But instead of coming out to receive him, Elisha sends his servant out to tell Naaman to go dip himself in the Jordan River seven times.

Naaman is upset. He came all the way from Aram only to be told to take a bath? There are better rivers back home! Elisha could have at least come out to see him. To be honest, I think Naaman wanted to see some special effects too, because he says: “*I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the*

Lord his God, and wave his hand over the spot and cure the leprosy!” Nope. Not gonna happen, big guy.

Thankfully, one of Naaman’s servants says, “Listen, why not just do it? If Elisha had asked something hard—some quest or ritual—you would have done it. But instead, he told you to do something simple. Why the big fuss?” Naaman’s pride was getting in the way of his healing. How many times do we miss out on opportunities for blessings when we let our pride get in the way?

Stage Four:

Naaman goes to the Jordan, and not only is he healed of his leprosy, but *“his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young boy, and he was clean.”* Healing—whether emotional, spiritual, or social—often asks us to let go of our ego and do the small, ordinary things: listening, apologizing, showing up, or forgiving. Sometimes the biggest miracles happen in the smallest obediences.

So what’s the big picture lesson here? Even though Naaman’s restoration came from God, it came through an unnamed slave girl and an unnamed prophet’s errand boy. The slave girl offered salvation without asking for anything in return. She could’ve said, “Hey, if you repent or convert—or better yet, set me free—I’ll let you in on this little secret.” But she didn’t. She didn’t abandon or neutralize her faith and culture to deliver the good news

that she could have kept to herself. After all, she was an enslaved captive. Yet when she saw Naaman suffering, she empathized and said there was a prophet in Israel who could heal him. Why would she do this? Funny how God leads us to some of the most unlikely helpers. An Israelite captive brought hope to one of her captors!

I wonder how often we miss out on potential blessings because we refuse to accept the one who might lead us there. Think about it—Naaman was an outsider in this story. A foreign military commander, often in conflict with Israel, yet he was healed. That shows me that God's table is much bigger than we think. No one is outside the reach of God's love.

So, again, what's the lesson here? *Slow down. Don't be so wrapped up in your pride or fear or whatever it is that keeps you from recognizing and receiving God's blessings.* Sometimes the journey to healing and wholeness starts with embracing the surprising—and often simple—paths that God sets before us.