

03

SESSION THREE

The Healing of Naaman

SESSION SUMMARY

In this session, we will look at the story of the prophet Elisha's healing of a foreigner named Naaman. This story gives us a beautiful illustration of our need for salvation and healing from God, as well as the humility required to receive that healing. Unless we are humble enough to receive God's salvation in the way He has planned, we will not be healed of our spiritual disease. However, once we humbly receive His grace, we are set free to testify to His goodness and reflect glory back to Him through our obedience.

SCRIPTURE

2 Kings 5:1-19

THE POINT

God's cure for spiritual sickness involves humility and repentance.

INTRO/STARTER 5-10 MINUTES

Option 1

Nearly every story, whether in a book or movie, has a main character who's main goal is to overcome some personal flaw or struggle. Often times the character will appear to be strong and larger than life on the outside, but struggles within to find some sort of redemption in those areas where he or she falls short. In the story you are about to see, we meet such a character in the person of Naaman. Naaman was a strong warrior and leader, but Naaman had some serious struggles to overcome—both a physical one in the form of leprosy, and a spiritual one in the form of a prideful heart. And as we will see, Naaman's path to overcoming his physical struggle would only come about by first addressing the internal struggle of pride that waged war in his heart.

- **Who are some characters from books or movies that you can think of that needed to overcome some personal flaw or struggle?**

Option 2

Place students into groups of three. Give each pair one piece of tissue paper, five marbles (or another weighted item), a cup of water, and a cotton swab. (*Tip: If able, go outside for this activity.*) Instruct two students to hold the tissue paper tightly between them. Then, instruct the third student to dip the cotton swab in the water, and allow a few drops to fall on the center of the tissue paper. Next, ask the student to place the five marbles on the tissue paper. Instruct the students to pour half of the remaining water onto the marbles and paper, so the marbles fall through the paper. Bring the group back together as a whole, and ask:

- **What did the water do to the tissue paper? Why do you think the marbles fell through when you added more water?**

The water weakened the paper and allowed the marbles to fall. Similarly, sickness weakens us. Doctors can prescribe medicines that help us heal, but there isn't anything we can do to heal ourselves, we can only rest and follow the doctor's orders. In the same way, spiritual sickness (sin) weakens our spiritual lives. Just like we use doctors and medicine to help with physical healing, we needed someone to heal the rift in our relationship with God. There is nothing we can do to heal that rift on our own. The only way to be healed from spiritual sickness is to humble yourself, repent of your sins, and trust in Jesus for salvation.

- **What are some things that might keep you from admitting your need for spiritual healing or asking God for help?**

HIS STORY

15-20 MINUTES

THE POINT

God's cure for spiritual sickness involves humility and repentance.

CHARACTERS

- **The Triune God** - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit
- **Elisha** - prophet of God
- **Naaman** - commander in a foreign army

PLOT

From the beginning, Adam and Eve were dependent upon God for life, purpose, and their daily sustenance. Soon, however, in the arrogance of their independence the couple chose to be like God rather than depend upon God (Gen. 3:4-5). Not only was the first family driven from the Garden because of their disobedience, but each subsequent generation down to today received from them a fallen nature scarred by the arrogance of their rebellion. Diseased by our pride, certain death looms on the horizon unless we return to the childlike faith God requires.

In this session, we will look at the story of the prophet Elisha's healing of a foreigner named Naaman. This story gives us a beautiful illustration of our need for salvation and healing from God, as well as the humility required to receive that healing.

TIMELINE

THE HEALING OF NAAMAN

Naaman is healed from his leprosy.

ISAIAH'S ENCOUNTER WITH GOD

Isaiah encounters God and is forever changed.

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesies about the Suffering Servant.

NAAMAN RECOGNIZES HE HAS A SERIOUS DISEASE

Physical miracles in the Bible are historical manifestations of the power of God. From these manifestations, we glean important spiritual truths. Naaman's dramatic healing is an ancient account of God's active grace in one man's life. It is also an important reminder of the impact of grace for us today. Look at how the story begins.

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master and in high favor, because by him the Lord had given victory to Syria. He was a mighty man of valor, but he was a leper. 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. She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." So Naaman went in and told his lord, "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." (2 Kings 5:1-4)

At first glance, Naaman seemed to possess all the necessary qualities and blessings of what we might consider a successful life. As the commander of the Syrian army, he was highly esteemed by the king himself. Despite his being a Gentile, the Lord actively blessed Naaman's work. His military prowess and relentless bravery were unquestioned.

But behind all the accolades, this Aramean hero battled a skin disease called *leprosy*. Not only was this malady incurable, but it also tainted every good thing in Naaman's life. The joy of his present reality could not rival the future demise that awaited him. Leprosy was a death sentence, leaving the star general hopeless and defeated.

Naaman's road to healing began at an unusual place with a young Jewish servant who compassionately shared a word of hope that changed everything.

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. 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." 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." But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn

his clothes, 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.” So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha’s house. (2 Kings 5:5-9)

In an effort to be helpful, the king of Syria loaded his general down with gifts in order to secure the action of the Israelite king. Acknowledging his inability to perform a miracle of healing, the monarch responded with fear that the entire exercise was nothing more than an effort to renew an old Syrian feud.

However, the prophet Elisha saw the genuine desperation of the appeal. Apart from God’s action, nothing would prevent Naaman’s death. As God’s prophet in Israel, Elisha was not the solution to the problem; instead, he was the appointed means for dealing with it. The seriousness of leprosy mandated miraculous intervention. With every other avenue exhausted, the God of Elisha was the last remaining hope for this dejected warrior.

NAAMAN RESPONDS TO GOD'S INSTRUCTIONS

Imagine the scene. Naaman has shown how desperate he was by traveling all the way to the door of Elisha’s house. He certainly recognized the seriousness of his health situation and his absolute dependence on someone or something else to bring healing. But recognition of his desperate state was not all that was required of Naaman. He would have to humble himself. That is what we see next, when Elisha’s puzzling instructions struck at the heart of Naaman’s pride.

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.” 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. 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?” So he turned and went away in a rage. But his servants came near and said to him, “My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it? Has he actually said to you, ‘Wash, and be clean?’” 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. (2 Kings 5:10-14)

The focus of this story is not the supernatural ability of Elisha. That’s made obvious by the prophet sending a messenger to meet Naaman instead of greeting him personally. The focus was on the humility required to receive grace and the single source from which grace comes—God Himself.

A similar pattern shows up in two other recorded instances of leprosy in the Old Testament (Moses and Miriam). Diagnoses such as these are so severe that only God can bring healing. That's why, when Jesus healed lepers in the New Testament He was demonstrating His identity as the powerful God of the Old Testament. In a spiritual sense, leprosy's physical depiction of our spiritual sickness reminds us that only God can make us alive.

Unfortunately, we are not always eager or willing to yield to God's prescription for healing. Expecting a ritual of some sort, Naaman was insulted and angry over the seemingly ineffective remedy for his predicament. Likewise, we often reason that there must be some sort of ceremonial observance, religious activity, or sacramental participation that will make us right with God. Or we simply presume upon God's gracious nature and hope for forgiveness that requires no repentance or humbling of ourselves.

NAAMAN PRAISES GOD FOR HEALING

As we pick up the story, we see Naaman doing two things in response to his miraculous healing. First, he gives credit to the Lord by praising the God of Israel. Secondly, he wants to give something in return. Look how Naaman, the once-proud foreigner concerned about his own glory, sought to reflect glory back to God through his praise.

Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said, “Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; so accept now a present from your servant.” But he said, “As the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will receive none.” And he urged him to take it, but he refused. 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. 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, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, the LORD pardon your servant in this matter.” 19 He said to him, “Go in peace.” (2 Kings 5:15-19a)

Realizing the magnitude of what took place in his body, Naaman's eyes were opened to the reality that grace is found in the God of Israel alone. No false god could have brought about immediate, comprehensive healing such as this. The general humbled himself and confessed the core Jewish belief that there is only one true God who deserves worship and praise.

- Compare Naaman's words in the previous passage with his words in this passage. What difference do you see in his attitude? What are the signs that he has been radically changed? (p. 24, PSG)

TIMELINE

GOD RESCUES JUDAH

God spares Judah from the Assyrian army.

HOSEA AND GOMER

God's faithful pursuit of an unfaithful people.

JONAH

God goes to great lengths for people to hear the good news of salvation.

CHRIST CONNECTION

As we have seen throughout our study of the Bible's storyline, the people of Israel wavered and faltered often in their faith. They continually devoted themselves to the idols of the surrounding nations and abandoned the purity of their worship of the one true God. The story of Naaman is interesting because the author of this account wanted us to see that a *foreigner* in this case is more *faithful* than God's chosen people. Naaman made a confession that the backslidden Israelites were unwilling to make. Jesus lamented this same reality in Luke 4:27, saying, "And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

Like Naaman, the solution to our sickness is the same. No amount of effort, resources, or human connection can rescue us from the heart infection that we all suffer from. Left to ourselves, we will die in our trespasses and sins despite our attempts to the contrary. Apart from the cross, our lives spiral toward certain death and judgment (Rom. 1:18-19).

The good news is that Jesus Christ bore the leprosy of our souls by sacrificing Himself for us (Isa. 53:4). Jesus is not just the best hope we have; He is the only hope we have. Receiving the grace of God through His Son in no way diminishes the offense of our fallen existence. If anything, Christ's insistence that He must do for us what we cannot do for ourselves reinforces how painfully wicked we are apart from God's rescue.

99 ESSENTIAL DOCTRINES

Guilt and Shame

Guilt refers to the objective status of someone being found guilty for a wrong committed, as well as the incurring of punishment that comes with it (Matt. 5:21-22; Jas. 2:10).

Shame is the emotional pain that comes from sinful actions. Scripture teaches that human beings are guilty in an objective sense, and also feel the weight of shame in a subjective sense.

YOUR STORY

10-15 MINUTES

GROUP QUESTIONS

God's Story has always been designed to connect with your story. It is because of His Story that our stories make sense, have meaning, and carry on into eternity. Use the questions below to help think through how His Story connects with your own.

- **What external factors do we look to when evaluating whether a person is "successful" or not? How might these external factors distract us from the seriousness of our spiritual disease?** *Answers to this will vary, but may include things like: how well known or liked someone is, how much money someone has, how talented one might be, and so forth.*
- **Naaman's story teaches us that receiving forgiveness requires humility and repentance. Why do you think humility and repentance are rarely mentioned when people talk about salvation?** *People sometimes talk about salvation as if it only involves affirming certain truths, rather than a heartfelt trust in God that includes repentance and humility. While it is true that we cannot earn favor with God or work our way into His good graces, it is also true that the Bible repeatedly states that repentance (which comes with humility) is a must for a right relationship with God.*
- **How can familiarity with the gospel leave us unmoved by its reality? What are some ways to overcome this temptation? What are practical ways to give glory back to God?** *One way to overcome this temptation is by keeping an open eye to the ugliness of sin in one's own life. By doing so, one can remain sensitive to the harsh reality of what sin is and its devastating effects, making him or her all the more appreciative of the grace of God in salvation, which in turn cultivates the heart for worship and praise.*
- **How has the story of Naaman challenged you when thinking about your own sin and pride?** *Answers will vary.*

HIS STORY
God's Story of
Redemption,
through His Son,
Jesus Christ.

YOUR STORY
Where your story
meets His.

YOUR MISSION

10-15 MINUTES

HEAD

Often we have the notion that we must add to or complete God's work in our lives. Like Naaman, calling on the Lord in repentance and faith seems as minimal to us as washing ourselves in the Jordan River. But this lack of humility comes not only from a hopeless confidence in our diseased will, but also in thinking that God's contribution to our salvation cannot possibly be enough. This is why God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (Jas. 4:6).

- **To receive healing, Naaman wanted to wash in waters other than the river prescribed.**
What are some “waters” people turn to for salvation, other than humble repentance and faith? *This question is simply designed to help students think through the things we often turn to, believing they will contribute to our salvation. So, “other waters” might include things like: good works, faithful church attendance, and so forth.*
- **When we look to these “other waters,” what does that tell us about how we actually view the sacrifice of Christ?** *In short, it tells us we underestimate the work of Christ on the cross by thinking we need to contribute or add to His work of salvation.*

HEART

As we will see, Israel's northern kingdom will soon fall (2 Kings 17), only to be followed by the southern kingdom's demise (2 Kings 24-25). The root cause of such destruction was simple: a refusal to worship God. The religious hypocrisy of these Israelites can serve as a warning to us about what to avoid in our own lives. Those who are outwardly religious often lack a sincere, heartfelt relationship with God. To remain unmoved by all that Christ endured to purchase our redemption suggests that an individual has not truly experienced the transforming power of God. To know Him is to love Him, and to love Him is to worship Him.

- **What does a hypocritical life look like?** *A hypocritical life often looks good on the outside (behavior looks good, speech is clean, etc.), but is completely dead on the inside (no genuine love for God or others, no submitting to Jesus' Lordship over their lives, etc.).*
- **How can you avoid living life hypocritically?** *The biggest way to avoid being a hypocrite is to fall in love with Jesus, humbly submit to Him, and repent of one's sins. Being in a right relationship with God is the key to being alive on the inside.*

HANDS

The contrast between this powerful Syrian man and the weak maiden who aided him could not be more evident. It teaches us once again that God uses the foolish to shame the wise, the weak to shame the strong, and things that are viewed as nothing to lead to something only God could accomplish.

- **How does the maiden serve as an example for us to point others in our lives to the saving knowledge of truth?** *Answers will vary.*
- **What does this teach us about being used by God in our own lives?** *For starters, it teaches us that God doesn't necessarily use those who, by worldly standards, are the best and brightest. Instead, as we often see, He uses those whose character and heart are in pursuit of Him.*

► ADDITIONAL INFO

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following additional resources:

- **Leader Training Videos**
- **One Conversations**
- **Midweek Studies (to access your Midweek Study, go to lifeway.com/TGPFall16Chron)**
- **Circular Timeline Poster**
- **App (for both leader and student)**



Additional suggestions for specific groups are available at
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