

God has a unique faith journey for each one of us. For example,

- Peter was at UC Berkley in the 1960s. He was a brilliant student and was a fan of Timothy Leary and drug experimentation. Peter dove headfirst into psychedelic drugs after reading Aldous Huxley's book A Brave New World. During one of his drug-induced trips, he encountered a demon. Peter knew he touched the unseen world, and it terrified him. He was so frightened that he went to a phone book and looked up churches. The first church listed was the Assembly of God. God used a demon to tap Peter on the shoulder.
- Nabeel Qureshi made a friend in college who was a Christian. Being a devout Muslim, he hoped to convert his friend to Islam. Though this friendship, Nabeel's attacks upon Christianity turned into questions. He found himself in a strange place, practicing Islam but being drawn to the teachings of Jesus. For years Nabeel could not leave Islam behind, but he had no logical reason to stay. Intellectually, Christianity made more sense and answered all his questions. Then, through a series of dreams, God tapped Nabeel on the shoulder. He wrote a book entitled, Seeking Allah Finding Jesus.
- Your faith journey is unique to you. God wants all people to come to him. Peter wrote, 'He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2Pe 3:9 NIV).'



This fall, we are looking at some Biblical characters. We can learn a lot from the stories of our spiritual ancestor's success and failures.

- We have looked at Jabez who prayed, and God blessed and Abigail who was a wise woman married to a fool.

Today's story is about God tapping Naaman on the shoulder. As we go through his story, let's pay attention to the people God used to bring Naaman to repentance and faith in God.

- Naaman is a seeker, even though he has no idea he is seeking God.
- We will see that there is a whole collection of people who help Naaman discover God. There is no superspecial sermon by an evangelist that changes everything, but a process that builds faith step by step.

Naaman – Seeker

The main character is foreigner, a pagan. Aram (modern day Syria) was a kingdom just to the north of Israel.



1. The General, 2Ki 5:1-2.

'The king of Aram had great admiration for Naaman, the commander of his army, because through him the Lord had given Aram great victories. But though Naaman was a mighty warrior, he suffered from leprosy. ²At this time Aramean raiders had invaded the land of Israel, and among their captives was a young girl who had been given to Naaman's wife as a maid (2Ki 5:1-2 NLT).'

Naaman is a successful general and a loyal friend to the pagan king Benhadad.

Interesting. God helped Naaman win battles.

- Leprosy would have excluded him from society in Israel.
- The level of leprosy (Hansen's disease) was enough to affect Naaman's life.
- But, as a Syrian general, he could remain active.

One of the victories against Israel brought a young Israeli girl into his household as a slave for his wife.

Here is her big moment.

2. The Slave, 2Ki 5:3.

'One day the girl said to her mistress, "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy (2Ki 5:3 NLT)."'

This is when God taps Naaman on the shoulder. You would expect this young girl to be angry and seek to undermine her mistress, but instead, she offers a solution to his leprosy.

As we go through today's story, let me give you a practical list of things to help your neighbors and family to faith.

Helping Others Towards Faith

1. Watch your attitude.
 - If this servant girl had been nasty, sullen, critical, or devious, Naaman would not have listened to her advice.
 - But she was a young lady worthy of respect even though she was a slave.
2. Expose your faith, don't impose it.

- She framed her advice as a wish. If she had been preachy or pedantic I doubt she would have been heard.
 - She planted the perfect seed of hope for the Holy Spirit to take root in Naaman's heart.
3. Relax and have faith.
- This girl was casual in sharing her faith – 'He will heal you.'
 - She had heard of the miracles God had worked through Elisha and had full confidence that God could do it for her master.

Two kings now play a part in Naaman's story.

3. The Kings, 2Ki 5:4-7.

'So Naaman told the king what the young girl from Israel had said. ⁵"Go and visit the prophet," the king of Aram told him. "I will send a letter of introduction for you to take to the king of Israel." So Naaman started out, carrying as gifts 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. ⁶The letter to the king of Israel said: "With this letter I present my servant Naaman. I want you to heal him of his leprosy." ⁷When the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes in dismay and said, "Am I God, that I can give life and take it away? Why is this man asking me to heal someone with leprosy? I can see that he's just trying to pick a fight with me (2Ki 5:3-7 NLT).'"

Aram's King Benhadad facilitated Naaman's journey.

- He followed the custom of the day with letters of introduction and even payment for a healing.
- Naaman must have been an exceptionally good general for the king to do this.

Israel's king assumed the letter was a prelude to war. 'I can't heal anyone, this is impossible.' Nevertheless, the Lord worked it out so that he could ...

Helping Others Towards Faith

1. Watch your attitude.
2. Expose your faith, don't impose it.
3. Relax and have faith.
4. Be a good neighbor. If it were me, I would mulch my leaves and be done for the winter, but my neighbors all rake and bag their leaves. So that mine does not blow all over their yards, I rake mine up and cart them to the compost center. My hope is that by being a good neighbor it will help them hear any words of faith I share.

Just then, Elisha sends a message.

4. Elisha, 2Ki 5:8-12.

'But when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes in dismay, he sent this message to him: "Why are you so upset? Send Naaman to me, and he will learn that there is a true prophet here in Israel (2Ki 5:8 NLT)."'

The Holy Spirit is drawing Naaman. Yes. He was seeking a healing, but God was drawing him through leprosy. Elisha recognized Naaman as a seeker.

- Isaiah wrote, 'Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near (Is 55:6 NIV).'
- It is likely that there were many false prophets in Israel at the time. These prophets would lead Israel astray in the coming years. So, Elisha said to the king of Israel 'he will learn there is a true prophet in Israel.'
- Regarding Naaman, Elisha probably thought, 'he will meet the one true God.'

'So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy." ¹¹But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the Lord his God and heal me! ¹²Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage (2Ki 5:8-12 NLT).'

This general has travelled hundreds of miles, brought a lot of money, and even brought diplomatic papers and Elisha does not even meet him face to face. Why?

Why was Elisha aloof?

- To test Naaman's faith.
- To avoid national politics.¹
- To highlight God as the miracle worker, not himself.

Helping Others Towards Faith

1. Watch your attitude.
2. Expose your faith, don't impose it.
3. Relax and have faith.
4. Be a good neighbor.
5. Make sure they see Jesus. I bought one of the first Macintosh computers and became an evangelist for the machine. One day a man who worked on an IBM mainframe daily said, 'pastor, I hope you are as excited about Jesus as you are

¹ Paul R. House, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture 1&2 Kings, Vol. 8* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 1995), p. 272.

MacIntosh.’ It cut to the heart. Let’s not hinder the gospel with our life choices. Let’s make sure they see Jesus.

Naaman was furious. His expectations were not met. He imagined Elisha waving his hand or speaking words over him – instead, he is told to dip in a dirty river.

- He arrived with a large company of officers; he looked important and was important; his pride was deeply wounded.
- Like us he thought, ‘I want cleansing on my terms, in my way, earned by my merit.’ ‘For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ... it is the gift of God—⁹not by works (Ep 2:8-9 NIV).’

Fortunately, God had just the right soldiers there.

5. A Step of Faith, 2Ki 5:13-14.

‘But his officers tried to reason with him and said, “Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn’t you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, ‘Go and wash and be cured!’”

¹⁴So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him (2Ki 5:13-14a NLT).’

The wise officers he brought with him knew how to ask a good question, one that appealed to his pride.

Helping Others Towards Faith

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5. Make sure they see Jesus.
6. Ask good questions.

Most people need to have their questions answered before they make a faith decision.

- You can help them along by asking good questions.
- Faith must make sense, but intellectual understanding alone will not bring someone to faith.
- The Lord says, ‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord (Is 55:8 NIV).’ Human reason falls short.
- Faith comes from revelation when the Holy Spirit whispers to the human heart.
- Believe only makes sense from within, not from without – it is by faith and revelation.

Something in Naaman's heart responded, 'If I do this, then I will be healed.'

- Faith requires an action; it is a verb.
- Just like the woman reaching out to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, Naaman went into the muddy waters and dipped. Seven times.

And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed (2Ki 5:13-14 NLT)!

- He humbled himself and took a step of faith, God healed him and he met the author of life.

Let's look at one more part of Naaman's story.

6. God's Faithfulness, 2Ki 5:15-19.

'Then Naaman and his entire party went back to find the man of God. They stood before him, and Naaman said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant." ¹⁶ But Elisha replied, "As surely as the Lord lives, whom I serve, I will not accept any gifts." And though Naaman urged him to take the gift, Elisha refused. ¹⁷ Then Naaman said, "All right, but please allow me to load two of my mules with earth from this place, and I will take it back home with me. From now on I will never again offer burnt offerings or sacrifices to any other god except the Lord. ¹⁸ However, may the Lord pardon me in this one thing: When my master the king goes into the temple of the god Rimmon to worship there and leans on my arm, may the Lord pardon me when I bow, too." ¹⁹ "Go in peace," Elisha said. So Naaman started home again (2Ki 5:15-19 NLT).'

This makes us uncomfortable. Naaman does not go through a new believer's class, nor does he have a Bible. His request is to allow him to work out his own worship of Yahweh. Elisha knew there was a threat of merging true worship with that of a pagan god.

On a practical level,

- Naaman had no Bible.
- There was no time to learn more about Israel's Yahweh.
- He had to make compromises to retain his high position.

But on an experiential level, Naaman had encountered the living God and knew that Rimmon was not a real god.

- His king's worship was an empty gesture.
- Naaman gave a solid confession of faith – there are 'no gods but the LORD (v. 17).'

On the one hand, the dirt was a common custom of the day, souvenir.² But on the other hand, it was a reminder to him of the living God. He would spread the dirt and kneel to worship the Maker of heaven and earth.

Elisha trusted the Holy Spirit to guide Naaman's future.

Helping Others Towards Faith

1. Watch your attitude.
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3. Relax and have faith.
4. Be a good neighbor.
5. Make sure they see Jesus.
6. Ask good questions.
7. Allow the Holy Spirit room to work. (Last slide of this).

God wants your family, your friends to come to faith as well. Let the Holy Spirit lead them just as he does you – don't push, or you may find yourself fighting God.

Conclusion.

God has a unique faith journey for each one of us.

Each one of us is one of us is either like Nabeel's friend, the pastor who picked up the phone for Peter in Berkley, CA, or Naaman's slave girl. Friends, lets 'Live wisely among those who are not believers, and make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone Col 4:5-6 NLT).'

Or, today perhaps you are like Nabeel, Peter, or Naaman today and you sense God's tap on your shoulder. Jesus said, 'Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in (Re 3:20 NIV).'

I encourage you to 'Seek the Lord while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. ⁷Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the Lord that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously (Is 55:6-7 NLT).'

Faith requires an action – raise hand.

Pray

² House, *1&2 Kings*, p. 273.