

OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

TEXT: 2 Kings 5

INTRODUCTION:

STORY: It was the year 864 B.C. The nation of Israel had been divided into two kingdoms for nearly two centuries. Although they had at times warred against each other, that was not usually the case. They had far more in common than they had differences. Both kingdoms often united their forces for both defense and conquest, and the people remembered their common ancestry from Abraham and King David. The northern kingdom retained the name of Israel. The southern kingdom took the name of its dominant tribe: Judah.

The single greatest factor that united Israel and Judah was their apostasy. For most of the years of the divided kingdoms, the Bible summarizes the reign of one king after another as “He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord.”

But in the year 865, an unusual thing had happened. Both kingdoms bowed before a king they called Jehoram. It was not a single king, ruling both nations. The northern kingdom bowed to Jehoram of Israel. The southern kingdom followed Jehoram of Judah. But as their fathers had been, the two King Jehorams were united against a common enemy to the northeast, the nation of Syria where Ben-Hadad ruled with great power and a mighty army.

The army of Syria was so strong, they raided both Israel and Judah with impunity. The soldiers would enter a city and carry off whatever goods and people they desired and then returned to their homes all the wealthier because of it. They feared no reprisal from their inferior neighbors.

One of the most powerful and effective generals in Ben-Hadad’s army was a man named Naaman. Naaman’s forces had won victory after victory for Syria. He was a hero with the people and respected by all, even the king. But the year 864 brought an end to Naaman’s joy and feelings of success. His skin began to turn a grayish white, and open sores began to devour his entire body. He had leprosy. He went to the physicians for their salves but to no avail. He knelt in the temple of the demon god Rimmon, but he got no help. He was miserable. He was perishing. He was dying.

But God had put a believer in Naaman’s household. She was a little servant girl that had been captured in one of the raids on Israel. Naaman had brought her back as a slave and given her to be a maid for his wife. One day this godly young woman said to her mistress, “If only Master Naaman could see the prophet Elisha who lives in Samaria. He could heal Master Naaman; I know he could.” Her mistress responded with skepticism, “How do you know that, child?” “Because of all I heard that God does through him, ma’am. He multiplied food for the prophets and for the widow, and he even raised a little boy from the dead!”

Naaman’s wife did not know whether she should believe her servant or not, but she told her husband, who had no other prospect for help. In those days, Lepers just suffered, withered, and died.

Naaman was immediately interested. It was hope to a dying man. If such help existed in Israel, he would have it. Anything else in Israel was his for the taking. This would be as well.

Naaman went to King Ben-Hadad and asked permission to go to Israel to gain a cure from this dread disease. The king not only granted permission, he sent a letter with Naaman to the King of Israel, one of the Jehorams, demanding that Naaman be healed. When Naaman and his entourage arrived, the letter was brought to King Jehoram. Jehoram's reaction is a testimony to his utter wickedness and lack of faith in God. The Bible says when he read the demand of the King of Syria, he tore his clothes saying, "Am I God, to kill, or make alive? Why does he think I can cure leprosy? He is just looking for an excuse to start another war with us."

For his own safety and the well-being of his kingdom, the King of Israel did not reveal his doubt and inability immediately to Naaman. While he delayed in his response, word of his predicament came to Elisha, the prophet of God. Elisha promptly sent a message to the king, "No need to rend your clothes. Send Naaman to me and soon he will know that God has put His man in Israel." The king gladly honored Elisha's request, and soon Naaman and all who traveled with him were standing in front of the humble house of Elisha the prophet of God.

The scene must have looked surreal: Nathan in his dress uniform as a general of the army of Syria, standing in a royal chariot, surrounded by armed guards and palace footmen, six beautiful steeds pawing the dirt of the road, not quite wide enough for all of them. All of this out in front of a small, plain house, with a simple wooden door and a couple of small windows, indistinguishable really from the dozens of other houses that lined the street.

And when the servant of Naaman knocked upon the door, Elisha himself refused to come out. Instead, Elisha sent his own servant out to Naaman and told him to go and wash himself seven times in the River Jordan and he would be cleansed of the leprosy.

Naaman immediately became furious. "Will this prophet of Israel's God not even come out and appear before me in person? Will he insult me by addressing me through a servant? I thought he would come out and wave his hand in the air and the leprosy would be gone. Now he wants me to go bathe in the Jordan River. Why we have better rivers than the Jordan in Syria. If I wanted to try to wash away this disease, I could do it there." and Naaman left Samaria in a rage.

But when his party stopped for a break on the way back to Damascus, some of Naaman's servants came to him to plead with their master. They said, "Master, if the prophet of Israel's God had given you some great and difficult task to do in order to be healed, would you have done it?" "Of course," Naaman replied. "Then why not do this little thing he has said and see if his God can heal you?" Naaman was persuaded, and the company traveled on to the edge of the Jordan River. There Naaman waded into the water according to the word of the Lord through Elisha the prophet. He submerged himself seven times in its flowing waters. When he came up the final time, his skin had been made new. The leprosy was gone. Naaman was healed.

Naaman went back to Samaria, and this time, Elisha greeted him. Naaman said to him, "Now I know that there is no God but the God of Israel."

From the story of Naaman's troubles come powerful lessons on dealing with our own troubles and difficulties. If we want to overcome our difficulties, like Naaman we must first

I. GET GOD'S INSTRUCTION

A. **Naaman got it from the prophet.**

B. **We get it from God's Word.** Even if you go to a modern prophet, if he is a true prophet and not a false prophet, he will give you God's Word.

C. **People run to and fro for all kinds of help:**

- **self help books**
- **quirky web sites**
- **secular counselors**
- **worldly friends**

but **God is the One with lasting solutions.**

D. Like Naaman, **we often react negatively to the simplicity of God's instructions to us.**

1. **Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church. Eph. 5:25**

Ladies, put your fingers in your ears.

Men, most of the trouble in marriage relationships begins because we do not practice this command!

And, most of the trouble in marriage relationships can be fixed when a husband, with his whole heart, starts loving his wife the way Christ loves the church.

Men, you start sacrificing self for your wife, and you will see her transformed. You start giving her your time, your attention, your affection, your tender care, and you will discover a woman who is devoted to you and responsive to you.

2. **Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. Eph. 5:22**

Now men, it is your time to not hear for a minute. Some of you can just go back to sleep.

Wives, listen. Everybody submits to someone. All of us are under authority; it is just a matter of who.

- We submit to teachers at school.
- We submit to bosses at work.
- We submit to policemen.
- We submit to the IRS.
- We submit to God.

No one can survive without submitting to someone, usually many someones, whom God has put in authority.

Wives, God has placed your husband in authority in your home.

- The teacher is not always right, but she is in authority.

- The boss is not always right, but he is in authority.
- Even policemen are not always right, but they are in authority.
- The IRS is not always right, but it is in authority.
- Your husband will not always be right. You may think he is never right. God has still put him in authority, and when you refuse to submit to his authority you disobey God.

3. **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Eph. 6:1**

Teenagers and want to be teenagers, listen.

You would be absolutely amazed at the difficulties that would be resolved in your lives if you just simply obeyed your parents.

If instead of determining how much smarter you are, how out of touch they are, how unreasonable they are, you just say, "God, my parents may not always be right, but You are always right. I trust You, so I will obey them."

You would find God working a lot of things out in your life.

E. But instead of getting God's clear and simple instruction from His Word, we want something complex, something magical. We want someone to wave their hand and cause the problem to be gone.

F. Brothers, and sisters, what we really need is God's instruction; and we find it in His Word. That is why we need to read God's Word.

That is why you need to be in Lifechange Groups, regular in worship, in Bible studies.

You got problems? Answers are found in the Word of God.

II. DO WHAT GOD SAYS

A. Let me ask you a question. How many times have you sat in this place and some part of the Word of God just hit you between the eyes and you said, "That's for me. That is what God is saying to me." Now that was not due to any fancy words on my part. I am just the messenger, like Elisha's servant. I just deliver the word that God gives in the Bible.

B. But back to my question. How many times have you sat in this place or in your Lifechange Group and some part of the Word of God just hit you between the eyes and you said, "That's for me. That is what God is saying to me." But then you went home and did nothing about it; you did not do what the word instructed you to do, and you came back the next week with absolutely nothing changed.

C. God says, **James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**

D. If you have marriage or family trouble, take Eph. 5 & 6. Read it. Do it. You will be amazed at the results God will give when you have an Ephesians style family.

III. DO ALL OF WHAT GOD SAYS

- A. **What if Naaman had only dipped himself 5 times or 6 times?** Would he have been partially cleansed, partially healed? I do not know, but he would have not been completely healed.
- B. That's what we have to do. **We cannot just pick and choose from God's Word** and say, I like this part so I'm going to do that, but I don't care much for this part so I am not going to do that. **If we want success, we must do it all.**
- C. On Eph 5 & 6: Read it and do it. Every verse, not just the parts you think apply to marriage or to you, every verse. You will be amazed at the result. You'll be saying, "It's a miracle."
- D. **One of two things often happens that discourage people who start doing God's Word from doing it all.**
1. One is that as they do God's Word, they see progress. **They make enough progress that they become satisfied so they do not complete what God's Word told them to do. Then the problem comes back, sometimes worse than before.** Doing a little of God's instruction is like taking a few days of antibiotic when the doctor prescribes it for 30 days. You may feel better quickly, but then the infection returns and with greater force.
 2. The second thing that sometimes happens is that **people do some of what God's Word says, but they see no progress; and they give up. They say, "This is not working."**
 1. Listen. **God's Word works when you do it.**
 - It never returns void.
 - Sometimes it works progressively and you see progress along the way.
 - But sometimes it does not produce the fruit until it all is done. It can be like baking a cake. If you tasted it before all of the ingredients are added to the batter, you might dump it down the drain.
 2. The giving of the tithe is a good example of this. God says if we give Him the tithe He will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on us. Sometimes people say, well, I am going to start at 7% and see what happens. Maybe I will work my way up to 10%. Well it does not work like that, because a tithe is 10%. God does not promise blessings at 7 or 9.5.
- E. You want to be cleansed? You want to overcome the difficulty? Do what God says. Do it all!

CONCLUSION: I wonder how many Naamans I am preaching to today. **A "Naaman" is someone with a problem who is either seeking God's instruction or struggling with whether to obey it.** I've been a Naaman plenty of times in my life.

1. You got a problem? Would you commit to seek out God's instruction until you find it?
2. You got a problem that you know what God says about it? Will you quit looking for the wave of a hand or better rivers and commit yourself to do it?
3. You still have a problem because you quit early? Will you do all of what God says?