

*The LORD delights to surprise us with both hard truth and extravagant grace. In this story of a highly regarded, hyper-successful pagan military general who seeks a cure for his leprosy, his search yields something else—a renewed heart for God. Have God’s “clues” surprised you with “something else” yet?*

**Introduction** – Do you remember where you were on 5 August 2012?

**Background** – The contrast between Naaman the “stranger” to God’s people, and the two young folks who are “son and daughter” of God’s people. No matter who you are, if you humble yourself you will receive grace and God will bring you near to himself. But if you spurn his grace, God will drive you away. The main point of any Bible passage need not be overshadowed, but is highlighted by other bits of truth we might find in it.

## **I. The Clues of God**

### **A. A mature faith is a child-like faith (vv. 2-3, 14)**

In the Bible, the Lord intended Israelites to be evangelistic witnesses to the nations, but examples of this kind of testimony are rare in the OT. In this case, a young girl tells her mistress, the wife of the soldier who captured her and dragged her away from home into a foreign land, about the goodness of the LORD, the God of Israel. The LORD can cure her master’s leprosy through the prophet who wields God’s miraculous healing power. The nameless, little girl had kept her faith in God in a pagan land while serving her captors, who evidently had been treating her kindly. And she spoke with such confidence—ready with an answer for her faith in the God of Israel (1 Pet 3:15). Her faithfulness, even though it does not lead to her release, served as a model for God’s people of every era who have opportunity to point Gentiles and pagans to the LORD God of Israel (cf. Neh 2; Dan 1).

### **B. Worldly and public affairs can blind you to hope hidden in plain sight (vv. 7-8)**

Syria’s king incorrectly assumes Israel’s king (likely Joram) controls his own prophets. That’s not the way it works with true prophets in Israel! Joram is estranged from the LORD and his prophet, so he doesn’t consider Elisha, and may not even realize that Elisha can work the requested miracle in God’s name. And who could blame the king, saddled in a brewing conflict with a powerful rival nation demanding his full attention? There is enough tension between the two nations that Joram concludes Syria is picking a fight by asking for a miracle for its commander standing before him. In Joram’s opinion, the Syrian king’s letter represents another excuse for a military raid on his people. The king can’t cure Naaman’s leprosy! Who can? Only God can kill or make alive (Dt 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6). So the king tore his clothes, showing hopelessness, sorrow (Gen 37:34; 2 Sam 13:31; 2 Kgs 6:30; Job 1:20; 2:12; Isa 37:1) and consternation (2 Kgs 2:11-13; 22:11-13).

### **C. God loves to humble (and embarrass) you, but only because he loves you (vv. 1, 5, 9-27)**

1. Here we have a clue that God is not impressed with your position or possessions. Naaman in the kind of person who excels in both categories. Consider his position. He’s the five-star general of the army...of Syria. That country was a rising power in the region after the Assyrian Empire farther north fell apart. No one outranked Naaman but his king, who considered him “a great man” and held him in “high favor.” Why? Naaman had won impressive military victories for Syria (courtesy of Israel’s God!). Naaman was “a mighty man of valor” and the king loved him because his right hand man brought glory to king and country. Consider his possessions—the stuff at his disposal that he hauls down to Israel. “Ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing.” That’s 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold. In

today's US dollars the silver and gold equal \$750 million! And those 10 sets of clothes were something to behold. The man was quite impressive.

2. Naaman was off-the-charts rich, proud, and entitled. But God loved him despite it all. And God loved him enough to sneer at his accolades, assets, and entourage. The Bible says over and over that God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble (Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). Elisha also loved Naaman. Otherwise he would not have offered him the cure for leprosy. Naaman needed to learn that grace is not impressed, grace is not for sale, and grace is unmerited favor simply because God loves to shower his mercy on sinners. Even if they must be humiliated first.

## II. The Surprises of God

### A. You have leprosy in your soul, but there is a cure (vv. 3, 11-12, 20-27; cf. Lk 4:16-30)

Are you surprised? Readers throughout history who rightly interpret God's clues have always discerned Naaman's story is the mirror image of Gehazi's story. Both had leprosy of the soul, and both responded in contrasting ways that instruct us. Because their story is our story, my story, your story. Naaman the proud, pompous, pagan leper is certainly a sinner. But he is also every sinner. Although he came to Israel's God a social pariah with skin defiled by a dreaded, incurable, degenerative disease, God knew his *leprosy* was more than skin-deep. So is mine. So is yours. Leprosy is a picture of sin and the uncleanness that prevents any relationship with the holy God. Elisha's servant Gehazi is racist, resentful, and rapacious with greedy visions of attaining the good life. He is no less a sinner. And he also is every sinner. Although he is a privileged insider in God's kingdom, the personal assistant to the LORD's prophet, admired and revered for his reputation for godliness, God knew his *religion* was only skin-deep. Clean on the outside, leper on the inside. Apart from God's grace and mercy, so am I, so are you. This type of leprosy of the soul cannot protect even the servants of God from temptations to abuse status and take advantage of others. Gehazi is a portrait of a hypocrite who does not take in the benefits of grace that surround him.

### B. No matter who or where you are, you can have a right relationship with God (vv. 1-3, 17)

God providentially placed a young servant girl, a kidnapped captive, in Syria for a purpose—to be a light to the nations testifying to the goodness of the LORD God of Israel. It didn't matter that she was outside the Promised Land, in a place where no one worshiped the living God. She remained faithful to God's purpose. Naaman was a pagan from far away. But God found and redeemed him too.

### C. Forsaking your idols to serve God exclusively is not constraining, but liberating (vv. 17-19)

The dialogue between Naaman and Elisha surprises with tantalizing possibilities. Once Naaman sees he's healed, his heart is converted away from worshipping Rimmon (Syria's version of Baal) to serve only Israel's God. Next Elisha refuses any payment for God's miracle. So Naaman ask for two favors: a load of holy dirt, and a pagan temple pardon. It appears he wants the dirt to build a holy altar to the LORD back home in Syria. Who could object to that? So far so good. But then there's this problematic detail about his job. Whenever the king of Syria worships in the temple of Rimmon, he requires Naaman to assist him in bowing down to the idol. Naaman no longer wants to do it, and he won't be worshipping Rimmon in his heart, but helping the king worship is part of his job description. Must Naaman quit his high-paying, illustrious job and become a poor monk or something? Serious question: what do you think? The faithful man of God does not constrain his new convert, but sets him free to worship the LORD in the messiness of real life. What a surprise!

**Conclusion** – Sleuthing around 2 Kings 5 for a few clues of God has led us to some of God's surprises. Every one of you set out with me on this search looking for something. Maybe it was intellectual stimulation? Or confirmation of your prior beliefs? Or a warm worshipful feeling? Perhaps you found what you came looking for, but I hope you found what the gospel promises: something else. [Prop]